

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**CONSERVATION COVER**

(Ac.)

**CODE 327**

**DEFINITION**

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

**PURPOSES**

This practice may be applied to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Improve air quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.
- Improve soil quality.
- Manage plan pests.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on all lands needing permanent vegetation. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Species shall be adapted to soil, ecological sites, and climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of noxious, invasive species shall be avoided.

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose.

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling, and planting of the seed or planting

stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival.

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used. Vegetative planting material (e.g. sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs) shall be from a reliable supplier.

The selected seed mixture will contain at least 60 percent perennial grasses (based on pure live seed) rated excellent, good, or fair for erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. No more than 20 percent of the desired stand will be species rated poor for erosion control.

Site preparation shall be sufficiently adequate to eliminate weeds for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological or chemical methods, by prescribed burning, or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, the PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) conservation practice must be included as a planned practice.

All nutrients shall be applied following the NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT (590) practice standard. Soil tests will be required to determine the fertilizer and soil amendments to be applied for establishment and stand maintenance.

**Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Sedimentation**

The amount of plant biomass and cover needed to reduce wind and water erosion to

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resource Conservation Service or download the standard from the electronic Field Office Technical Guide for Missouri.

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the planned soil loss objective shall be determined using the current approved wind and/or water erosion prediction technology.

### **Additional Criteria to Improve Air Quality**

In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries and nursery stock, vegetation established shall provide full ground coverage in the alleyway during mowing and harvest operations.

To sequester carbon, plant cover established will result in a positive CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent value when determined by the current approved carbon prediction technology.

### **Additional Criteria to Enhance Wildlife Habitat**

#### **Planting/Establishment**

Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity to maintain an open structure for wildlife. Refer to the UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT (645) conservation practice standard.

Mixtures where wildlife is the primary objective will contain multiple species (2 or more) with 70 percent or more of the pure live seed having a good or excellent rating for wildlife habitat and erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. A seed mixture will not contain a primary grass or legume species with a poor wildlife habitat rating. Select species that create an open structure that allows increased forb production and wildlife movement.

The following adjustments may be made to the base seeding rates of an acceptable mixture when adding a wildlife forb mix:

- 1) when adding one (1) pound per acre of pure live seed native forb and native legume mix to a grass seed mixture, reduce the grass seed rate in the entire mixture by 5 percent; or
- 2) when adding two (2) pounds per acre of pure live seed native forbs and native legume mix to a grass seed mixture, reduce the grass seed rate in the entire mixture by 15 percent.

The native species in a wildlife forb and legume mix to be included in a seed mixture

shall contain a minimum of 10 species in the mix with no single species to exceed 15 percent of the mix. The forb and legume mix shall have no more than 15 percent annuals or biennials combined.

Refer to the RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RARE OR DECLINING HABITATS (643) practice standard for a listing of approved native forbs and native legumes.

#### **Management/Maintenance**

Methods used shall be designed and selected to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

### **Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality**

Plants will be selected on the basis of producing high volumes of organic material to maintain or improve soil organic matter. The amount of biomass needed will be determined using the current soil condition index procedure.

### **Additional Criteria to Manage Plant Pests**

In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries and nursery stock, permanent vegetative cover shall be established and managed according to the Integrated Pest Management guidance of the University of Missouri Columbia for the target pest species.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species. Consider a diverse mixture of grasses, forbs, and legumes.

Certified seed and planting stock that is adapted to the site should be used when it is available.

Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from broadleaf weeds.

On sites where annual grasses are an expected weed problem, it may be necessary to postpone nitrogen fertilizer applications until the planted species are well established.

Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.

Rotate management and maintenance activities (e.g. burn only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

Use native species when available. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site.

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. These shall include, but are not limited to, recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures, and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

Use the criteria in the Vegetation Establishment, Herbaceous Seeding (723) specification for this conservation treatment.

Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Mowing and harvest operations in perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, and nursery stock shall be done in a manner which minimizes the generation of particulate matter.

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species in each state. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.