

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)

CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSES

- Reduce runoff, soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance or establish wildlife habitat.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on land to be retired from agricultural production requiring permanent protective cover, and on other lands needing permanent protective cover. This includes ground cover for Christmas trees, orchards, and vineyards. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage or hay production, to severely eroding areas normally requiring Critical Area Planting (Code 342), or to reestablish perennial vegetation on areas where crops are occasionally grown.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, site, and climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of 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.

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Site preparation shall be sufficient 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 Standard (Code 338) must be included as a planned practice.

Nutrients and maintenance applied in excess of those needed to establish and maintain the vegetative cover shall be applied following the Nutrient Management Standard (Code 590) requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment

Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity.

Management/Maintenance

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

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

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control undesirable 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.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

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

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g. mow 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.

Plantings made with a primary emphasis on wildlife habitat shall follow the seeding/planting specifications for Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 645) or Early Successional Habitat Development / Management (Code 647).

Plantings made with primary emphasis on forest products shall follow the seeding / planting specifications for Tree/Shrub Establishment (Code 612).

Plantings made with grasses and legumes primarily for erosion control shall follow the seeding specifications for Pasture and Hay Planting (Code 512) or Critical Area Planting (Code 342).

Specifications shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Species to be planted
2. Seeding or planting rates and dates
3. Soil amendments and mulching (if required)
4. Establishment procedures
5. Other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.
6. If pesticides are to be used, follow standards and specifications for Pest Management (Code 595).

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

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following operation and maintenance information should be provided, at a minimum:

1. Where wildlife habitat is the primary purpose, maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.
2. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds.
3. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.
4. Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended.
5. Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.

6. In Christmas trees, orchards, and vineyards, vehicular traffic should be kept to a minimum to avoid destruction of the cover. Continual use of the same travel lanes should be avoided when possible.
7. Reseeding any area where cover has been destroyed should be accomplished during the next appropriate seeding period.
8. To maximize ground cover in Christmas tree plantations, orchards, and vineyards, chemical control of competing ground cover should be kept to the minimum required for proper culture of the trees or vines.