

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**RIPARIAN HERBACEOUS COVER
(acre)**

CODE 390

DEFINITION

Riparian areas are ecosystems that occur along water courses or at the fringe of water bodies. Riparian herbaceous cover consists of grasses, grasslike plants, and forbs.

PURPOSE

To establish or manage desirable herbaceous cover on riparian areas and restore ecological functions which:

Provide habitat (food, cover, shelter, and water) for aquatic and terrestrial organisms and provide corridors as landscape linkages between existing habitats.

Intercept direct solar radiation, create shade, and restore or stabilize the desired depth-width ratio to help maintain the ecological functions of the riparian and aquatic system.

Improve and protect water quality by intercepting and reducing the amount of sediment and other pollutants, pesticides, organic matter, and nutrients in surface runoff as well as nutrients and chemicals in shallow ground water.

Add stability to the channel bed and stream bank.

Improve or maintain desired plant communities.

CONDITION WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice may be applied along watercourses or on the fringe of water bodies where the natural plant community is dominated by herbaceous vegetation.

Where the ecosystem has been altered and the potential natural community has changed or has been converted to cropland, pastureland, grazing

land, etc. and the establishment of herbaceous cover is warranted.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Select native species that are adapted to site conditions and provide a diversity of cover and food for wildlife. Species selected must also provide a deep, binding root mass to strengthen stream banks and improve soil health.

Site preparation and planting shall be done at a time and manner to insure survival and growth of selected species without compromising the intended purpose(s) of the practice. Only viable, high quality and adapted planting stock will be used.

Selected plant species shall be adapted to grow under the duration of saturation and/or inundation of the site.

If the area is used for livestock or hay production, Prescribed Grazing - 528A or Forage Harvest Management - 511 will be planned to protect and enhance established emerging vegetation.

Other practices essential to the success of Riparian Herbaceous Cover shall be planned and applied according to the needs of the site. Such practices include, but are not limited to:

Streambank and Shoreline Protection - 580

Stream Channel Stabilization - 584

Vegetative Bioengineering - NCS

Fence - 382

Riparian Forest Buffer - 391

Wildlife Upland Habitat Management - 645

Wildlife Wetland Habitat Management - 644

Pasture and Hayland Planting - 512

Range Planting – 550

Critical Area Planting – 342
 Filter strips – 393
 Pest Management
 Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats – 643

Additional Criteria to Protect or Improve Water Quality

Concentrated flow erosion or mass soil movement shall be controlled in the up gradient area prior to establishment of the riparian herbaceous cover.

The plant community will be managed and maintained to optimize functions within the riparian zone.

Contributing areas shall be managed to reduce sheet and rill erosion and nutrient and pesticide runoff.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider the causes of the degraded condition.

When on-site native seed sources are present natural regeneration may be allowed to develop an adequate cover.

Consider combining this practice with filter strips to improve water quality.

Consider application of this practice on a watershed basis to address habitat fragmentation, connectivity, and provide corridors of wildlife habitat.

Consider this practice as part of an overall management system.

Consider establishment of alternative water sources or controls on livestock access to the stream and riparian area.

Consider native plant species that have multiple values for wildlife cover, aesthetics, erosion control, and tolerance to locally used herbicides.

Avoid plant species that may be alternate hosts to undesirable pests. Species diversity should be considered to avoid loss of function due to species-specific pests.

Consider channel and stream bank stability during the design of this practice to determine if

other practices may be needed to adequately address bank stability.

The location, layout and density of the practice should complement natural features.

Corridor configuration, species planted, and management should enhance habitats for threatened, endangered, and other species of concern, where applicable. Consider that the structure of the plant habitat is vital to animal diversity.

Consider how introduced species may become invasive or detrimental.

Consideration should be given to managing the adjacent lands in order to maintain the longevity of the practice.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Specification shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The purpose of operation, maintenance, and management is to insure that the practice functions as intended over time.

The riparian area will be inspected periodically to maintain its function for the intended purpose. Adverse impacts such as excessive vehicular and pedestrian traffic, pest infestations, pesticides, livestock damage and fire should be monitored.

Harmful pests present on the site will be controlled or eliminated as necessary to achieve and maintain the intended purpose.

Management systems will be applied to maintain the vigor and reproduction of the desired plant community. Timing of haying or grazing periods will avoid periods when soils are saturated and vulnerable to livestock or mechanical damage.

A riparian functional assessment can be used to monitor the change in riparian ecological health and thus indicate future management direction.