

Landowner _____

**WHAT IS CONSERVATION COVER?**

This practice involves establishing and maintaining a cover of permanent vegetation to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSE

This practice is used to:

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation
- Improve water quality
- Enhance wildlife habitat

HOW IT HELPS THE LAND

Conservation cover benefits the land by providing a permanent protective vegetative cover. This reduces soil erosion, sedimentation in water bodies and improves overall water quality.

WHERE THE PRACTICE APPLIES

Conservation cover applies to land retired from agriculture production requiring permanent protective cover. Generally, this involves land under contract in a land retirement program but does not exclude land retired for other reasons. The practice does not apply to planting vegetation for forage production or on critical eroding sites.

WHERE TO GET HELP

For assistance in planning a conservation cover, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service or your local Conservation District office.

APPLYING THE PRACTICE

Select grasses, forbs, legumes, or trees and shrubs that are adapted to the soil, climate conditions, and planned purpose of your cover.

In selecting plant species, it is important to consider long term land use objectives. If wildlife is a consideration, adapted species are usually available that can serve more than one objective.

Be sure to select viable, high quality seed or planting stock to insure an acceptable level of plant survival.

Determine proper seeding rates and methods for herbaceous seed and proper planting distances for trees and shrubs.

Make fertilizer and lime applications prior to planting based on a current soils test recommendation for establishing new grass seedlings.

Existing erosion problems need to be dealt with before planting.

Maintenance for the Cover

Established grass stands should have at least 0.5 plants for foot of row or for bermuda sprigged grass, at least 10 live plants per 100 feet of row. If the stand does not have this plant density, reestablishment, additional seeding, fertilizing and/or other practices may be needed to achieve the desired plant density.

Dead trees and shrubs need to be replaced the following spring.

Weed Control

Weed control during establishment is critical for the survival of seedlings. When a weed canopy of $\geq 50\%$ or 3 weeds per square foot exists on 50% or more of the field, weed control measures need to be taken.

When forb and legume species are part of the planting mixture, weed control measures need to be planned that minimize the negative impacts on these species.

Noxious weeds need to be monitored and controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Brush Control

Apply brush control measures when undesirable brush species occupy an area of the field.

Insect Control

When insect populations exceed threshold levels in the field or threaten adjacent lands, insect control may need to be performed.

Excessive Plant Residue

If plant residues exceed 5000 lbs/ac the stand should be evaluated for signs of dead crowns and smothering of grass plants causing stand deterioration. Grasses need to be evaluated during their appropriate growing season. Stands showing signs of deterioration due to excessive plant residue build up, should have the excess residue removed mechanically or by burning.

Considerations

Always consider using conservation cover to promote wildlife by creating or enhancing habitat.

Consider using a mixture of grasses, forbs, and legumes to encourage plant diversity in the landscape. Trees and shrubs can also be planted on adapted sites to help meet habitat requirements of certain wildlife species.

To benefit insect food sources for wildlife, consider spraying or controlling weeds using spot treatment methods to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators.

To protect nesting wildlife species during the reproductive period, avoid maintenance practices and activities, such as mowing, between May 1 and July 1.

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