

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Conservation Practice Standard

CONSERVATION COVER  
Code 327 (Acre)

**DEFINITION.**

Establishing and maintaining perennial vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources on land retired from agricultural production.

**PURPOSE(S).**

1. Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
2. Improve water quality.
3. Enhance wildlife habitat.

**CONDITION(S) 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 practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**CRITERIA.**

**Criteria Applicable to All Purposes:**

1. Species shall be adapted to soil, range site, and climate conditions.
2. Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of invasive species shall be avoided.
3. Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose. For seeding rates, mixtures, site suitability, fertility, and seeding dates see Appendix A – Forage and Legume Seedings, Section IV, Ohio FOTG.
4. 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.
5. Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used.
6. Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.
7. Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.
8. Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.
9. 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, Prescribed Burning, practice code 338, must be included as a planned practice.

10. All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
11. Temporary seedings may be needed under some circumstances. Use the following criteria to determine when a temporary seeding may be needed and mixtures to use for temporary seedings.

**TEMPORARY COVER SHALL BE ESTABLISHED WHEN:**

- a. The desired permanent seed or planting stock are unavailable and the crop residue / vegetative cover is less than 70%.
- b. The permanent seeding period cannot be met.
- c. The carryover of a persistent herbicide may prevent establishment of a permanent species.

**TEMPORARY SEEDING MIXTURES FOR HERBICIDE CARRYOVER AREAS:**

- a. Plant grain sorghum or a sudan/sorghum (Sudax) seeded at 20-25 lbs/acre where triazine carryover is a problem. Seed May 1 to July 15.
- b. Plant soybeans a 1.0 to 1.5 bu/acre where grass herbicide carryover is a problem.

**TEMPORARY SEEDING MIXTURES WITHOUT A HERBICIDE CARRYOVER**

Mixture	Rate	Seeding Period
Winter Wheat	1.5 - 2.5 bu/ac	October
Cereal Rye	1.5 - 2.5 bu/ac	Aug 1 - Nov 15
Oats	1.5 - 2.5 bu/ac	Mar 15 - Nov 1
Annual Ryegrass	15 - 20 lbs/ac	Mar 15 - Nov 1

**Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat**

**Planting/Establishment**

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

**Management/Maintenance**

1. Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.
2. Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species.
3. Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

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4. 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**

1. This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.
2. Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Use native species when available. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site.
6. 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.
7. Select species to establish with the long term objectives of the land user, the needs of the wildlife species, and the soil and water capability of the site.
8. Consider other conservation practices to provide cover and habitat e.g. 645 Wildlife Upland Habitat Management, 644 Wildlife Wetland Habitat Management, and 657 Wetland Development and Restoration.
9. Wildlife habitat can be enhanced by using a mixture of grass species See ***Appendix A – Forage and Legume Seedings, Section IV, Ohio FOTG.***

**PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They 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. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation. See the practice documentation sheet at the end of this standard for minimum documentation criteria.

**OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

1. 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.

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Conservation practice standards are reviewed and updated periodically. To obtain a current version of this standard contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the NRCS Web Site ([www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov)).

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2. Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended. Mow or clip only after July 15<sup>th</sup> where wildlife nesting is a planned purpose. This is a planned purpose for all CRP acres.
3. Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.
4. Reseed areas with poor cover.
5. Fields that may be reconverted to pasture, hay, or cropland within two years should be mowed or clipped at least annually to facilitate an easier conversion.

**References:**

**National Standard Conservation Cover (327), dated February 2000  
Appendix A – Forage and Legume Seedings, Section IV, Ohio FOTG  
Jobsheet 327**

<b>Practice Documentation For:</b> <i>Conservation Cover - 327</i>
<b>The following documentation must be in the case folder or engineering subfolder.</b>
<b>Practice Planning</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the practice part of a conservation plan?</li> <li>2. Have the purpose(s) for the practice been identified?</li> <li>3. Is the location of the practice identified on a map or plan drawing?</li> </ol>
<b>Practice Design</b>
<p>Have the following design criteria been addressed?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seed mixture(s) suited to the site and purpose.</li> <li>2. Time, rate, and method of seeding.</li> <li>3. Fertilizer requirements planned.</li> <li>4. The need for mowing or other weed control during the establishment period to reduce competition from weeds.</li> <li>5. Acres / Extent of the practice.</li> </ol>
<b>Practice Installation / Application</b>
<p>Does the practice meet the minimum criteria for the planned purpose(s)?</p> <p>Have the following criteria been documented in the assistance notes or practice jobsheet?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quality of the planned cover.</li> <li>2. Acres established.</li> </ol>
<b>Practice Deficiencies</b>
<p>If applicable, have the practice deficiencies been communicated with the decisionmaker?</p>
<b>Practice Maintenance</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic mowing when needed to maintain the health of the plant community.</li> <li>2. Mowing or harvest schedule with cutting heights to maintain the intended purpose of the cover.</li> <li>3. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.</li> <li>4. Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.</li> <li>5. Weed and brush control to fit the planned purpose.</li> <li>6. Fertilization of the cover.</li> <li>7. Spot treatment and renovation procedures for damaged areas.</li> </ol>
<b>Other Comments:</b>