

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)

CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

PURPOSES

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

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on land needing perennial protective cover. This practice does not apply to plantings where the primary purpose is for Forage and Biomass Production, Critical Area Plantings, or Tree/Shrub Plantings.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Use of this standard will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Only certified seed will be used. Certified Seed is cleaned, tested and labeled according to Indiana Seed Law (IC 15-15-1).

Seedbed preparation, species selection, seeding mixes, seeding rates, dates, depths, fertility requirements, site adaptation and

planting methods will be consistent with the requirements in the Indiana (IN) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Seeding Tool - Calculators, Guidelines and/or Tables found in Section IV of the IN Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock will ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival. Vegetative planting material (e.g. sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs) will be from a reliable supplier.

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.

Additional Criteria to reduce Soil Erosion

The amount of plant biomass and cover needed to reduce wind and water erosion to the planned soil loss objective will be determined using the current approved wind and/or water erosion prediction technology.

Additional Criteria for Improving Air Quality

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

To sequester carbon, plant species that will result in an increased CO₂ equivalent value using approved carbon prediction technology.

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

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat and Pollinator Habitat

General Habitat. When enhancement of wildlife habitat is the primary purpose, IN FOTG Standard (645) Upland Wildlife Habitat Management or (644) Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management will also be used.

Grasses, forbs, shrubs and/or legumes will be planted in a diverse mix to promote biodiversity and meet the needs of the targeted species of wildlife. Management practices and activities will not disturb cover for grassland species during the primary nesting period of April 1 through August 1.

When disturbance management is necessary to maintain the health of the plant community or habitat needs, see IN FOTG Standard (647) Early Successional Habitat Development/ Management.

When enhancement of pollinator habitat is a purpose, three (3) species of flowering broadleaf plants such as legumes will be planted, one per blooming period.

Rare and Declining Habitat: When the purpose is to restore herbaceous rare and declining habitat such as prairie, sedge meadow, etc., refer to IN FOTG Standard (643) Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats.

Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality

Establish species that produce high volumes of above and below ground vegetation to maintain or improve soil organic matter. The amount of biomass needed will be determined using the current approved 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 will be established and managed according to Land Grant University Integrated Pest Management (IPM) recommendations 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.

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.

Consider contacting a wildlife biologist for assistance in developing a plan to enhance the acreage for wildlife habitat.

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

Certified planting stock (such as bulbs or sprigs) that is adapted to the site should be used when it is available.

Use native species that are appropriate for the identified resource concern and management objective. Consider re-establishing the native plant community from local sources for the site where possible.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice will be prepared for each site. They will include, but are not limited to:

- recommended species,
- seeding rates and dates,
- establishment procedures,
- other management actions needed to ensure an adequate stand.

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

Where use of grazing livestock is permissible, a grazing plan will be written.

Where use of harvested forage is permissible, a forage harvest management plan will be written.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mowing and harvest operations in perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, nursery stock or areas sensitive to air quality, will be completed in a manner which minimizes the generation of particulate matter.

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

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

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

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control, or cosmetic purposes is not recommended.

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

Where use of grazing livestock is permissible, a prescribed grazing plan will be followed.

Where use of harvested forage is permissible, a forage harvest management plan will be followed.

REFERENCES

K. G. Renard, G. R. Foster, G. A. Weesies, K. D. K. McCool and D. C. Yoder. 1997. Predicting Soil Erosion by Water: A Guide to Conservation Planning with the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE), Agricultural Handbook Number 703.

Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation Version 2 (RUSLE2) website (checked September 2010):

http://fargo.nserl.purdue.edu/rusle2_dataweb/

USDA, NRCS. 2006. The PLANTS Database. National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

USDA, Indiana NRCS FOTG Section IV Seeding Appendix A

K.D. Johnson, C.L. Rhykerd, and J.O. Trott Agronomy Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana Forage Selection and Seeding Guide for Indiana AY-253.