NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

FIELD BORDER

(feet)
CODE 386

DEFINITION

A strip of perennial vegetation established at the edge of a field by planting or by converting it from trees to herbaceous vegetation or shrubs.

PURPOSES

To control erosion, protect edges of fields that are used as "turnrows" or travel lanes for farm machinery, reduce competition from adjacent woodland, provide wildlife food and cover, or improve the landscape.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

At field edges, especially edges of crop fields.

CRITERIA

Borders planted next to brushlands, windbreaks, or wildlands shall extend the entire length of the field. Other borders may vary in length, depending upon the objectives of planting and the nature of the problems.

The width of the borders is generally based upon the purpose to be served and the area needing treatment or protection. For optimum wildlife habitat, the seeding should be made in not less than one, and preferable two, standard drill widths.

Locally adapted standard methods of grass, shrub, and/or legume seeding will be used in establishing field borders.

Refer to the vegetative section of the technical guide for adapted species and rates of seeding.

CONSIDERATIONS

Select plant species that are compatible with the long term land use objectives and habitat needs of target wildlife species.

Select plant species that do not harbor plant pests.

Control of noxious weeds by mowing should be evaluated as an alternative to use of herbicides.

Endangered Species Considerations

Determine if installation of this practice with any others proposed will have any effect on any federal or state listed Rare, Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat. NRCS's objective is to benefit these species and others of concern or at least not have any adverse effect on a listed species. If the Environmental Evaluation indicates the action may adversely affect a listed species or result in adverse modification of habitat of listed species which has been determined to be critical habitat, NRCS will advise the land user of the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and recommend alternative conservation treatments that avoid the adverse effects. Further assistance will be provided only if the landowner selects one of the alternative conservation treatments for installation; or at the request of the landowners, NRCS may initiate consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service and/or California Department of Fish and Game. If the Environmental Evaluation indicates the action will not affect a listed species or result in adverse modification of critical habitat, consultation generally will not apply and usually would not be initiated. Document any special considerations for endangered species in the Practice Requirements Worksheet.

Some species are year-round residents in some streams, such as, freshwater shrimp. Other species, such as steelhead and salmon, utilize streams during various seasons. Be aware that during critical periods, such as spawning, eggs in gravel's, and rearing of young may preclude activities in the stream that may directly affect the stream habitat during those periods. For example there should be no disturbance of stream gravel beds that may have eggs in them. That could include any equipment in the stream or even walking in the stream or work upstream that may result in sediment depositing in the gravel beds. Document any special considerations for endangered species in the Practice Requirements Worksheet.

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

Water Quantity

The effects of field borders on surface and ground water quantities are minor.

1. Effects on the water budget especially on volume and rates of runoff.

Water Quality

This practice reduces erosion by having perennial vegetation on an area of the field. Field borders serve as "anchoring points" for contour rows, terraces, diversions, and contour strip cropping. By elimination of the practice of tilling and planting the ends up and down slopes, erosion from concentrated flow in furrows and along rows may be reduced. This use may reduce the quantity of sediment and related pollutants transported to the surface waters.

When the field borders are located such that runoff flows across them in sheet flow, they may cause the deposition of sediment and prevent it from entering the surface water. Where these practices are between cropland and a stream or water body, the practice may reduce the amount of pesticide application drift from entering the surface water.

1. Filtering effects vegetation on movement of sediment, dissolved and sediment-attached substances.

2. Effects on erosion and the transport of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances carried by runoff.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Practice specification shall be prepared to specify the (1) the area to be treated, (2) the width of the border, (3) the species to planted, and rate of seeding.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Annual mowing at the time of second cuttings of hay is the most feasible maintenance measure for herbaceous field borders. In the Mediterranean climate, such cutting should be delayed until ground-nesting birds have reached the flying stage.

Some borders may require reestablishment when the vigor of the stand has deteriorated to point where weeds are invading.

Regular applications of fertilizer will prolong the life of the stands and maintain them in a vigorous growing condition.

The borders should not be grazed to the point where wildlife cover values would be appreciably reduced.