

# Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Program Guidance for Establishment, Maintenance, and Management

## Attachment to Implementation Requirements

December 2015

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|--------------|-------------|
| Name:        | Farm/Tract: |
| Practice(s): | Date:       |

### INTRODUCTION

Land enrolled in CRP or CREP is required to be established, maintained, and managed in accordance with specific program requirements. Your CRP/CREP Conservation Plan and the associated Implementation Requirements (IR) sheets provide the requirements for establishment, maintenance, and management of the CRP/CREP cover and habitat. You may have received other information in the form of fact sheets or technical guides, but you must follow the requirements provided in your Conservation Plan. This document is provided as a summary of the rules and restrictions on lands enrolled in CRP or CREP.

### REQUIRED ACTIVITIES

- Enrolled practices must be maintained for the life of the contract.
- Filter Strips (CP21) and grass cover HEL practices (CP1, CP2) must be maintained in herbaceous cover. Participants may be considered out of compliance if the canopy cover of woody vegetation in a field exceeds 5% or constitutes a patch of 1 acre or more.
- Planting of the vegetative cover shall be completed by the end of the next normal planting season. A waiver may be granted if the prescribed seed or tree stock is not available.
- Control of noxious weeds (specifically, johnsongrass, shattercane, Canada thistle, bull thistle, plumeless thistle, and musk thistle) is required by State law.
- Invasive species should be controlled to the extent possible, and must be controlled if they will prohibit successful establishment or undermine the purpose of the planned vegetation. Areas with more than 20% invasive species may be considered out of compliance, so it's important to address invasive species problems as soon as they are identified.
- Chemicals used in establishment and management must be registered and applied in accordance with the label instructions.
- Practices must be protected from destructive fire (not prescribed burns).

### RESTRICTED ACTIVITIES

- Maintenance activities (e.g. mowing) may not be conducted during the *primary nesting season*. This restriction does not apply during the establishment period.
- Maintenance activities to control woody growth in herbaceous plantings may be implemented as frequently as

every 2 years. If herbaceous cover is established specifically for erosion control, it may be mowed more frequently, if necessary, to maintain a dense stand of grass. Annual mowing may be conducted when NRCS has determined, on a field by field basis, that less frequent mowing is insufficient to control woody growth. These areas should be identified in your Conservation Plan.

- After the establishment period, spot treatment of undesirable plants may be conducted during the primary nesting season with advanced approval from FSA. Contact your local FSA office.
- Haying and grazing may only be used on specific practices, with prior approval from the FSA. Reduced annual rental payments and other restrictions apply.

### MANAGEMENT OF COVER

#### PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

- Periodic or annual mowing for cosmetic purposes or generic weed control.
- Unauthorized grazing and haying. (Grazing and haying is only allowed with prior approval from FSA, and is subject to a reduction in the annual rental payment.)
- Using the land enrolled as a regular travel lane.
- Annual food plots, except for general sign-up enrollments that include approved CP12 food plots.

Practices enrolled as of the summer of 2003 require the performance of mid-contract management activities. Practices enrolled prior to the summer of 2003 may, at the participant's option, have management activities performed. Limited cost-share is available for specific management activities, if requested prior to conducting the activity.

For the purpose of water quality protection, the first 35 feet of herbaceous buffers is exempt from required management activities. (Note: This is not an exemption to the requirement to maintain Filter Strips (CP21) as herbaceous vegetation.)

Required management activities are based on the type of cover established. **Refer to your conservation plan and associated Implementation Requirements sheets for specific information.** Following are the types of management that may be prescribed or requested:

**Cool-season Grasses** - For any practice where the planting of cool-season grasses included a forb or legume, management shall be conducted, as necessary, to provide a diverse stand of grasses mixed with forbs and/or legumes. Management activities that may be used to maintain diversity include mowing, disking, and inter-seeding forbs and/or legumes.

**Native Grasses, Forbs, and Legumes** – For any practice where native grasses, forbs, and legumes were established, management shall be conducted, as necessary, to provide a diverse stand of grasses and forbs. Management activities that may be used to maintain diversity include mowing, disking, prescribed burns, targeted herbicide application, and inter-seeding forbs and legumes.

**Shallow Water Area (CP9) and Wetland Restoration (CP23)** – If a portion of the site was planned for active management as a moist-soil area, the required management activity is to lightly disk in the pool area every 3 years as described in the job sheet.

**Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (CP33)** – This practice requires strip disking starting in year 4 for naturally regenerated buffers, and in year 5 in planted buffers, and continuing through years 7 or 8. Disking must be conducted on a rotation of  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the plantings over a 3 year period. The legume component of the buffer must be maintained. If the legume component of the buffer is not maintained by disking or prescribed burning, then over-seed with legumes, as necessary.

**Diversions, Grass Waterways, and Contour Grass Strips** – Over-seed with forbs and/or legumes, as necessary, to maintain vegetative diversity.

**Customary Forestry Activities** – On tree plantings, stand thinning may be implemented on a voluntary basis by the participant. The participant must request the activity in advance, and the activity must be implemented according to written specifications provided by a State-licensed forester. Cost-share and incentive payments are available.

## DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – The CRP is a national USDA program administered by the Farm Service Agency. The CRP has general sign-up enrollments (announced), and continuous sign-up enrollments. Not all practices are eligible for continuous sign-up CRP.

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** – The CREP is a program within CRP that is specific to the State of Maryland. The CREP includes practices selected for their environmental benefits. In some cases, CREP program requirements exceed those of CRP.

**Cool-season Grass** – A type of grass that is most actively growing during the cooler portions of the growing season, usually in the spring and fall.

**FSA County Committee (COC)** – The COC is responsible for approving requests to conduct restricted activities on land enrolled in CRP and CREP.

**Establishment Period** – The period during which the vegetative cover is being established. For program purposes, the establishment period is 2 years for herbaceous plantings and 3 years for tree and shrub plantings.

**Forbs** – Any non-woody plants other than grasses, sedges and rushes. Most forbs are important food sources (e.g. seed, nectar, leaves) for wildlife.

**Farm Service Agency (FSA)** – The FSA is part of USDA and administers the CRP and CREP.

**Herbaceous** – The quality of a plant characterized by the lack of a woody stem.

**Highly Erodible Land (HEL)** – Land that has a high potential for erosion, as determined by specific soil conservation methods.

**Introduced Species** – A species that was not found in a geographic area prior to its introduction by man. Introduced species are often suitable for specific purposes, but lack compatibility with natural ecosystems.

**Invasive Species** – An introduced species that has become established, can reproduce, and does so to the detriment of native species and ecosystems.

**Legume** – A type of plant that has root nodules containing nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Legumes are important sources of protein and energy for many types of wildlife.

**Maintenance** – Activities conducted to maintain the established cover. This includes mowing and weed control. After the establishment period, maintenance activities may only be conducted outside the primary nesting season.

**Managed Haying and Grazing** – An activity that may be implemented on specific types of enrollments, with prior approval from the Farm Service Agency, as a maintenance technique. Reduced annual rental payments and other restrictions apply.

**Management, Mid-contract Management** – Activities conducted periodically to maintain vegetative diversity and wildlife benefits of the practice.

**Native Species** – A species that evolved with the natural ecosystem in a geographic area.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** – The NRCS is part of USDA and provides technical assistance for the CRP and CREP.

**Noxious Weed** – Weeds listed by the State as noxious, usually those that if uncontrolled, can be very problematic in agricultural lands. State-listed noxious weeds are required by State law to be controlled. In Maryland, noxious weeds are Johnsongrass, shattercane, Canada thistle, bull thistle, plumeless thistle, and musk thistle.

**Primary Nesting Season** – The period during which most land birds and small mammals nest. In Maryland, the official primary nesting season period is April 15 to August 15.

**Warm-season Grass** – A type of grass that is actively growing during the warmest months of the year, typically from June through August, and goes to seed in late summer. Warm-season grasses recommended for CRP and CREP plantings are native and perennial.

*This document was developed by NRCS, Maryland to provide guidance for participants in the CRP and CREP in Maryland, and should be included as an attachment to Implementation Requirements sheets provided to participants. NRCS provides technical assistance for implementation of CRP and CREP. The Farm Service Agency administers the CRP and CREP, and has responsibility for program enrollment and compliance. Information in this document was gathered from the Maryland CRP/CREP Field Handbook and the FSA 2-CRP manual.*