

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

CONSERVATION COVER

(Ac.)

CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover

PURPOSE

This practice may be applied to accomplish one or more of the following:

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

CONDITION WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on all lands needing permanent vegetative cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

CRITERA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, ecological sites, and climatic conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions.

Plant species, seedbed preparation, seeding rates, seeding dates, seeding depths, fertility requirements, and planting methods will be consistent with appropriate sections and tables in the "Establishing Vegetative Practices in

Kentucky" document located in Section IV of the FOTG.

Vegetative planting material (e.g. sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs) shall be from a reliable supplier.

Site preparation shall be sufficiently adequate to eliminate weeds for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

All nutrients shall be applied according to soil test recommendations that are based on the University of Kentucky's most current "Lime and Nutrient Recommendations" publication (AGR-1). Typically, fertilization is not recommended for native grass plantings for conservation cover purposes.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Sedimentation

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

The minimum seeding rates in the appropriate tables of the "Establishing Vegetative Practices in Kentucky" document may be increased by 25% to address erosion concerns when the site conditions warrant.

Additional Criteria for Improving Air Quality

In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries and nursery stock, vegetation established shall provide at least 80% ground cover during the driest period of the year and/or when the most traffic will be experienced..

In perennial crop systems, select vegetation that requires less frequent mowing operations.

To sequester carbon, plant cover established will result in a positive CO₂ equivalent value when determined by the current approved carbon prediction technology.

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

When an objective is to improve wildlife habitat, the seeding mixture should not contain species with a poor wildlife rating from the appropriate tables in the "Establishing Vegetative Practices in Kentucky" document. Select species that create an open structure that allows increased forb production and wildlife movement.

Native perennial forbs are important to many wildlife species. Increasing the number of forb species improves the wildlife habitat by increasing stand diversity. Forbs may be added to the seeding mix according to the appropriate tables in the "Establishing Vegetative Practices in Kentucky" document.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a spot basis.

Maintenance practices and activities will not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species (between May 15th and August 1st).

Annual mowing of the conservation cover for generic weed control is not recommended since it greatly reduces cover for next year's nesting period. If needed, conduct mowing and light disking activities outside the nesting season.

Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality

Plants will be selected on the basis of producing high volumes of organic material and prolific root systems (preferably deep-rooted) to maintain or improve soil organic matter. The amount of biomass needed will be determined using the current 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 shall be established and managed by incorporating the University of Kentucky's 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.

Certified seed and planting stock that is adapted to the site should be used when it is available.

Inoculating legume seed with the proper Rhizobium bacteria should be considered on sites where the legumes to be planted have not been previously grown.

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

On sites where annual grasses are an expected weed problem it may be necessary to postpone nitrogen fertilizer application until the planted species are well established.

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.

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.

Use native species that are appropriate for the identified resource concern and management objective. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site

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.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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

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

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

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mowing and harvest operations in perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries and nursery stock shall be done in a manner which minimizes the generation of particulate matter.

If wildlife habitat enhancement is a purpose, maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species (between May 15th and August 1st). Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.

Prescribed burning may be used to manage native grasses provided that a Prescribed Burning Plan is prepared in advance by the

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) or qualified Technical Service Provider. The landowner will be responsible for adhering to the burn plan and all local and state laws applicable to open burning in Kentucky.

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

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.

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 May 2007): http://fargo.nserl.purdue.edu/rusle2_dataweb/RUSLE2_Index.htm

Establishing Vegetative Practices in Kentucky (A complimentary document to KY FOTG 327, 340, 342, 386, 412, 643 & 645 practice standards). August 2008. Section IV of the KY FOTG