

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

FIELD BORDER
(Ft)
CODE 386

DEFINITION

A strip of permanent vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field.

PURPOSE

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

- Reduce erosion from wind and water
- Protect soil and water quality
- Manage pest populations
- Provide wildlife food and cover
- Increase carbon storage
- Improve air quality

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice is applied around the perimeter of fields. Its use can support or connect buffer practices within and between fields. This practice may also apply to recreation land or other land uses where agronomic crops including forages are grown.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes
Field borders shall be established around the field edges to the extent needed to meet the resource needs and producer objectives. Minimum field border widths shall be 1 rod or ½ the height of adjoining trees, whichever is greater.

The field borders will be established to adapted species of permanent grass, legumes, and/or shrubs that accomplish the design objective and do not function as host for diseases of the field crop.

No plants listed on the noxious weed list of the state will be established in a field border.

Plants selected for field borders will have the physical characteristics necessary to control wind and water erosion to tolerable levels on the field border area.

Seedbed preparation, seeding rates, dates, depths, fertility requirements and planting methods will be consistent with approved local criteria and site conditions. See practice standard specifications for 342-Critical Area planting; 327-Conservation Cover; or 645-Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for seeding recommendations.

For shrub cover, plant a minimum two rows of adapted shrubs. Refer to practice standards

645-Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, and 380-Windbreak/Shelterbelt establishment criteria.

Ephemeral gullies and rills present in the planned border area will be eliminated as part of seedbed preparation. If present, ephemeral gullies and rills located immediately upslope from the planned border area need to be treated to ensure more of a sheet flow into the planned border area.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Erosion from Wind and Water

Field border establishment, in conjunction with other practices, will be timed so that the soil will be adequately protected during the critical erosion period(s).

Establish stiff-stemmed, upright grasses, grass/legumes or forbs to trap wind- or water-borne soil particles.

The amount of surface and/or canopy cover needed from the field border shall be

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

determined using current approved water and wind erosion prediction technology. Calculations shall account for the effects of other practices in the management system.

Wind Erosion Reduction. **Locate borders to provide a stable area on the windward edge of the field as determined by prevailing wind direction data.**

Minimum height of grass or forbs shall be one foot during the critical erosion period.

Water Erosion Reduction. **Locate borders to eliminate sloping end rows, headlands, and other areas where concentrated water flows will enter or exit the field.**

Orient plant rows as closely as possible to perpendicular to sheet flow direction.

Additional Criteria to Protect Soil and Water Quality

Do not burn the field border if the main goal of the field border is to protect soil or water quality.

Reducing Runoff and Increasing Infiltration. **Locate borders around entire perimeter of the field, or as a minimum, install borders to eliminate sloping end rows, headlands and other areas where concentrated water flows will enter or exit the field.**

Water Quality – Adsorbed, Dissolved and Suspended Contaminants. **As a minimum, locate field borders along the edge(s) of the field where runoff enters or leaves the field. The minimum width for this purpose shall be 30 feet and have a vegetation stem density/retardance of moderate to high (e.g. a good stand of wheat).**

Design border widths to comply with all applicable state and local regulations regarding manure and chemical application setbacks.

Reducing Soil Compaction from Equipment Parking and Traffic. **Border widths will be designed to accommodate equipment turning, parking, loading/unloading equipment, grain harvest operations, etc.**

Additional Criteria to Manage Pest Populations

Provide a Harbor for Beneficial Organisms (e.g. insects, mites, etc.). **Include**

appropriate plants that attract beneficial organisms that prey on target pests.

Mowing, harvesting, pesticide applications and other disturbance activities will be scheduled to accommodate life cycle requirements of the beneficial organisms.

Provide a Habitat to Cause Pests to Congregate. **Select plants for the field border that attract pests (e.g. alfalfa strips planted to lure lygus bugs away from a cotton crop).**

Additional Criteria to Provide Wildlife Food and Cover

Establish plant species that provide wildlife food and cover for the target wildlife species. Schedule mowing, harvest, and weed control activities within the field border to accommodate reproduction and other requirements of target wildlife species.

Refer to practice standard 645–Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for additional recommendations.

Schedule mowing, harvest, weed control, and other management activities within the field border to accommodate reproduction and other life cycle requirements of target wildlife species.

Vegetative successional state shall be maintained to accommodate target wildlife species requirements.

When wildlife is a concern, a lower percent groundcover than would be needed if protecting soil and water quality was the only goal is acceptable as long as the soil resource concern is also adequately addressed (i.e. no excessive soil loss). This may be achieved by simply increasing the field border width.

Additional Criteria to Increase Carbon Storage

Establish plant species that will produce adequate above- and below-ground biomass for the site (i.e. a positive soil conditioning index).

Maximize the width and length of the herbaceous border to fit the site and increase total biomass production.

Do not burn if the main goal of the field border is carbon storage.

Do not disturb the roots of the established vegetation with tillage.

Additional Criteria to Improve Air Quality

Establish plant species with morphological characteristics that optimize interception and adhesion of airborne particulates. Select plants with persistent roots and residue that stabilize soil aggregates and capture airborne soil particles.

Establish species resistant to damage from equipment traffic.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider planting field borders around the entire field, not just on the field edges where water enters or leaves the field, for maximizing multiple resource protection.

Establishing a narrow strip of stiff-stemmed upright grass at the crop/field border interface can increase soil particle trapping efficiency of the field border.

Native plants are best suited for wildlife habitat enhancement and provide other ecological benefits where adapted to site conditions and when consistent with producer objectives.

Include native plants that provide diverse pollen and nectar sources to encourage local pollinator populations.

Field borders can be used to comply with required field setback distances applicable to manure and chemical applications.

Use field borders as corridors to connect existing or planned habitat blocks.

Prescribed burning, strip disking, or selective herbicide applications are management tools that can be used to maintain suitable habitat for specifically desired wildlife species.

Overseed the field border with legumes for increased plant diversity, soil quality, and wildlife benefits.

Schedule mowing, harvesting, and weed control to accommodate wildlife nesting needs and other special requirements or purposes.

Waterbars or berms may be needed to breakup or redirect concentrated water flows within the borders.

In selecting plant species to establish in the field border, among other items, consider the plant's tolerance to:

- Sediment deposition and chemicals planned for application
- Drought in arid areas or where evapotranspiration can potentially exceed precipitation during the field border's active growing period(s).
- Equipment traffic.

Design border widths to match the required field application setback widths for easier management (i.e. land-use and management changes occur in the same location).

Establish plant species that will have the desired visual effects and that will not interfere with field operations or field border maintenance.

Rows of shrubs (windbreak/shelterbelt, 380) adjacent to field borders will often enhance field borders ability to harbor beneficial insects, and may also provide additional wildlife benefits.

Consider using plant species that enhance the biomass collection opportunities.

Consider increasing the width of the field border to increase the potential for carbon sequestration.

Consider the amount of shading that the field border or portions of the field border may experience and select species for those locations accordingly.

Consider installing a contour buffer system, no-till or other conservation practices on adjacent upland areas to reduce surface runoff and excessive sedimentation of field borders.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare plans and specifications for each field or treatment unit according to the Criteria included in this standard. Specifications shall describe the requirements for applying this practice to meet the intended purpose. Record

practice specifications on the Field Border 386 Conservation Practice Job Sheet. The following components shall be included for recording this specification:

- Field Border widths and lengths based on local design criteria
- Location(s) within the field(s) or farm boundary
- Species to be used and the location and planting density of the species used
- Site preparation requirements
- Timing of planting and planting method
- Liming or fertilizer requirements
- Operation and maintenance requirements

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Field borders require careful management and maintenance for performance and longevity.

The following will be planned and applied as needed:

- Repair storm damage.
- Delay annual mowing for brush control until after August 1 and before September 1 to protect ground nesting wildlife.
- Remove sediment from above or within the field border when 6 inches of sediment have accumulated at the field border/cropland interface or when accumulated sediment either alters the function of the field border or threatens the degradation of the planted species' survival.

- Shut off sprayers and raise tillage equipment to avoid damage to field borders.
- Shape and reseed border areas damaged by animals, chemicals, tillage or equipment traffic.
- Maintain desired vegetative communities and plant vigor by liming, fertilizing, mowing, disking, or burning and controlling noxious weeds to sustain effectiveness of the border.
- Repair and reseed ephemeral gullies and rills that develop in the border.
- Minimally invasive tillage may be performed in rare cases where compaction and vehicle traffic have degraded the field border function. The purpose of the tillage is strictly to decrease bulk density and increase infiltration rates so as to provide a better media for reestablishment of vegetation and field border function.
- Maintenance activities that result in disturbance of vegetation should not be conducted during the nesting season of grass nesting birds.
- Avoid vehicle traffic when soil moisture conditions are saturated.

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 Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE), Agricultural Handbook Number 703.

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

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