

SECTION IV

PRACTICE STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS

What Are Conservation Practices?

Conservation practices are measures that can be used as a part of Conservation Management Systems (CMS) to prevent or treat problems associated with soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources. To assure that the required quality criteria are met for the resources of concern, the conservation practices must be installed, established, and maintained in such a way that the short-term and long-term CMS objectives are met. Conservation practice standards provide the basis for which the practices and measures are to be created and used.

Conservation practice standards developed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have evolved over the past 25 years in accordance with the advancement of farming techniques and with changes in technology. Standards are based on research, conservation field trials, and accumulated knowledge and experience. There is a continuing need to update practice standards to keep abreast of rapid changes in technology and to ensure that they address multiple resources and resource problems in a beneficial way.

Conservation practices can be structural measures, vegetative or agronomic measures, or management activities. Regardless of the type, they all have standards.

Contained in this section are the conservation practices most frequently used in Maryland, including the standards and specifications for establishment, and documentation requirements for the individual practices.

What's In A Standard?

Conservation practice standards establish the minimum level of acceptable quality for planning, designing, installing, operating, and maintaining the practice. Each standard has the same components, which are described as follows:

NAME: The official NRCS name for the practice.

CODE: The NRCS numeric code used for identification and reporting purposes.

UNIT of MEASUREMENT: The method of measuring and reporting the practice.

DEFINITION: A brief description of the practice.

PURPOSES: The primary reasons for which the practice is applied. The purpose identifies the resource problem(s) the practice can be specifically used to treat.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES: Describes the land uses and site conditions that affect the suitability or function of the practice. Conditions where the practice is unsuitable may also be explained. Limitations on the extent of the practice standard as set by NRCS policy are also included.

CONSIDERATIONS: Recommendations of items to consider when planning and designing the practice. They may address the effects of the practice in the conservation system, or requirements of the overall land use operation.

CRITERIA: Guidance for design of the practice to accomplish the identified purpose(s) of the practice. Specific criteria may be included for each purpose. Criteria are expressed in terms of allowable limits for design parameters, acceptable installation processes, or performance requirements. Minimum and/or maximum dimensions may also be described.

SPECIFICATIONS: Describes the plans and specifications needed for installing the practice. Specifications describe the technical details and workmanship required to install the practice, and the quality and extent of materials used in the practice. General specifications applicable to all sites in the state are contained in the standard. Site-specific plans and specifications must be prepared for each practice.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE: The O&M component describes the repetitive actions needed to insure that practices perform adequately throughout their expected life. *Operation* encompasses normal management actions, such as mowing, cleaning and clearing of debris, and other similar actions. *Maintenance* involves corrective actions such as repairs due to normal "wear and tear," replacement of damaged or worn parts, and re-establishment of practice components destroyed by natural causes.

Revisions To Standards

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

**The Maryland Technical Guide has been incorporated by reference
in COMAR 26.09.03, Agricultural Sediment Pollution Control,
effective October, 1993.**