Title of the Practice Conservation Cover (NRCS Conservation Practice 327)

Definition: Establishing and Maintaining Permanent Vegetative Cover.

Purposes: Permanently covered soil (typically a five year contract) reduces soil erosion and improves soil, air and water quality. By enhancing wildlife and pollinator habitat, conservation cover helps manage plant pests.

General Expectations: For purposes of the EQIP Organic Initiative, certified organic seed must be used, with the exception of Pollinator Habitat, where use is encouraged. If certified organic seed is not available, producers may opt to apply for general EQIP cost share financing to establish cover. In any event, species selected shall be adapted to soil, ecology and climatic conditions at the site, and suitable to the primary purpose(s) of the planting. Seeding rates, dates methods shall be appropriate for the site and adequate to ensure an acceptable rate of survival. Site preparation shall provide for the elimination of weeds that might otherwise interfere with establishment and survival of selected species. Nutrient applications, shall meet NRCS specifications as per Conservation Practice 590.

Additional management expectations for specific conservation purposes:

* The mix of species selected for purposes of “Organic Introduced Species” must include a minimum of three grass/legume three species.
* The mix of species selected for purposes of “Organic Native Species” must include a minimum of five grass/legume species.
* The mix of species selected for purposes of “Organic Native Shrubs, Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG) and Forbs” must include a minimum of five native shrub, NWSGs and forb species.
* The mix of species selected for purposes of “Organic Pollinator Habitat” must include a minimum of nine (9) species. Only two grasses may be included in the mix. At least three species shall have their primary blooming period during each of the following time frames: 1) April 1 to June 15; 2) June 15 to July 31; 3) August 1 to October 31.

Additional management considerations for specific resource concerns:

* This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.
* Mowing during the establishment period to reduce competition from weeds is recommended (at 6-12 inches).
* Fertilizing a cover mixture that includes grasses is likely to favor the grasses (and weeds) over the broadleaf species in the mix.
* Burning (preferred) or mowing one third of the managed area each year (in rotation) will suppress undesirable woody “weed” species and maximize diversity.

Operation and Maintenance: If wildlife habitat enhancement is a purpose, maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for the desired species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

North Carolina Practice financing (2014):

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| Practice | Component | Unit | Practice Rate |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Introduced Species | Acre | $148.66 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Introduced Species HU\* | Acre | $178.39 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Native Mix HU | Acre | $278.71 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Native Mix HU | Acre | $344.46 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Native Shrubs, NWSGs and Forbs HU | Acre | $499.20 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Pollinator Habitat | Acre | $294.70 |
| Conservation Cover | Organic Pollinator Habitat HU | Acre | 353.65 |

\*HU = Historically Underserved and Beginning Farmer Rates

South Carolina Practice financing (2014):

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| Practice | Component | Unit | Practice Rate |
| Conservation Cover | Native grass | Acre | $177 |
| Conservation Cover | Native grass HU\* | Acre | $212 |
| Conservation Cover | Pollinator | Acre | $372 |
| Conservation Cover | Pollinator HU\* | Acre | $446 |
| Conservation Cover | Legume | Acre | $143 |
| Conservation Cover | Legume HU\* | Acre | $171 |

\*HU = Historically Underserved and Beginning Farmer Rates