



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E327B

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Establish Monarch butterfly habitat

Conservation Practice 327: Conservation Cover

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Annual & Mixed); Crop (Perennial); Associated Ag Land; Farmstead

RESOURCE CONCERN: Animals

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 5 years

Enhancement Description

Seed or plug milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.), and high-value monarch butterfly nectar plants on marginal cropland, field borders, contour buffer strips, and similar areas.

Criteria

- Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acres.
- Establish and maintain habitat for monarch butterflies as described below:

A. Monarch butterflies

- Lists of larval host plants and nectar plants suitable for monarch butterfly habitat are provided in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
- A grass component to a monarch habitat planting is commonly needed for ecological stability, weed control, and fuel for prescribed burning. The FOTG provides information on the grass/forb ratio for monarch habitat plantings.
- To provide food (nectar and pollen) for adult monarch butterflies, at least 60% of the forb seeds (pure live seed) in the mix shall be from the monarch butterfly planting list



CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

(FOTG). Milkweed seeds are included in meeting the 60% minimum because milkweeds are excellent nectar plants. The FOTG provides information on the required number of forb species per bloom period (early, mid, or late season) for monarch habitat plantings. Bloom periods are to coincide with monarch presence in the area.

- To provide food for monarch butterfly larvae, plantings shall include at least one species of milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.) from the FOTG monarch butterfly planting list. All milkweed species used in the mix must be from this list and shall represent at least 1.5% of the total seeds in the mix. The total seeds include pure live seed from both grass and forbs. Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) shall not be planted.

Waiver: In some regions, a commercial source of native Asclepias species is limited or not available. In these situations, the NRCS State Conservationist may apply for a waiver, and only require that plantings include monarch nectaring species. In this situation, milkweed seed or plugs are still encouraged to be planted, if possible. If such a waiver is granted, the mix will result in at least 80% of the seed being from the state's monarch nectaring plant list.

- Any other use of the monarch butterfly habitat area must not compromise its intended purpose.
- If a Monarch Butterfly Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) is available for use in the state, a minimum planned Monarch WHEG score of "0.60 will be obtained for the planted area.

B. Planting criteria for monarch butterfly habitat

- Site selection should consider existing weed pressures and available methods of control. Delay planting and conduct an additional growing season of weed control if high weed pressure requires aggressive treatment.
- Site preparation and plant establishment shall be accomplished according to the state's specifications for NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Conservation Cover (Code 327) or Wildlife Habitat Planting (Code 420).
- Successful establishment is when the planting provides at least 80 percent soil cover when visually estimated, and resultant cover consists of at least 500 milkweed plants



CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

per acre (approx. 1 stem per each 100-sq. ft.), and successful establishment of at least two targeted nectar plants per bloom period when monarchs are present in the state. A milkweed plant is defined as a single stem emerging from the ground.

- Insecticides should not be used in the habitat planting area.
- Herbicides are allowed during site preparation (prior to planting) when it is necessary to eliminate competing weeds from a planting area in order for nectar and pollen producing plants to establish.
- After a monarch habitat enhancement has been planted, herbicides may be spot-sprayed to remove broad-leaf weeds, or grass-selective herbicides may be applied to larger areas to eliminate persistent weedy grasses. Similarly, in the first-year post-planting, the entire site may be mowed 8 to 10 inches high to reduce annual or biennial weeds that persist (site should be mowed just before dominant annual weeds flower).

C. Operation and maintenance for monarch butterfly habitat

- Management and/or maintenance activities such as mowing, haying, burning, or grazing shall be conducted outside of the season when monarch larvae or adults are present.
- Insecticides should not be used in the habitat planting area.
- The planted habitat areas shall be regularly inspected for invasive and/or noxious plants or other plants that may compromise the purpose of this enhancement. Undesirable species shall be controlled using Individual Plant Treatment methods, for example, spot-spraying with herbicide or physical removal of individual plants.



CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Documentation and Implementation Requirements

Participant will:

- Prior to implementation, provide a map showing the location of proposed habitat areas with notes on land use adjacent to proposed habitat areas to discuss with NRCS staff.
- During implementation, purchase specified seed mix or plant materials that meets monarch-specific seeding or planting requirements provided by NRCS.
- During implementation, follow habitat establishment guidance provided by NRCS in the state specifications for NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Conservation Cover (Code 327).
- After implementation, provide a list of management and/or maintenance activities carried out to manage the habitat areas and the dates on which those activities occurred.
- After implementation, provide photo documentation of monarch habitat areas.

NRCS will:

- Prior to implementation, assess habitat condition using a monarch Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) to calculate current WHEG score and anticipated WHEG score after implementation of Enhancement. **Benchmark WHEG score = _____ Planned Post Implementation WHEG score = _____**
- Prior to implementation, provide participant with suitable larval host plants and nectar plants lists.
- Prior to implementation, provide and explain State specifications for NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Conservation Cover (Code 327) or Wildlife Habitat Planting (Code 420).
- Prior to implementation, provide participant with a recommended seed mix and planting specifications per above criteria (grass/forb ratio; number of forb species per bloom period for monarch habitat plantings).
- After implementation, verify successful establishment (per planting criteria above).



NRCS Documentation Review:

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and have determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

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Participant Name _____ Contract Number _____

Total Amount Applied _____ Fiscal Year Completed _____

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

Date



2024 CSP ENHANCEMENTS – GUIDANCE & PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATION

ENHANCEMENT NUMBER AND TITLE:

E327B – Establish Monarch Butterfly Habitat

Conservation Practice 327: Conservation Cover

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ENHANCEMENT: This enhancement will be used to establish monarch butterfly habitat in Alabama with seeds or plugs on marginal cropland, field borders, contour buffer strips, and similar areas.

Some important things to note:

- A minimum of one-half acre (1/2 ac) of planting must be completed for every 40 acres of land in the CSP application, regardless of land use. (1.25% of total acres)
- Select plants from the approved plant list. At least three must be planted from each bloom period for a total of at least 9 species.
- Area should be treated with appropriate herbicides prior to establishment of pollinator habitat if johnson grass, cogon grass or other hard to eradicate species such as bahia or Bermuda are present.
- NO fertilizer will be applied to the site at planting.
- More diverse mixes will likely result in superior habitat for monarchs and for pollinator communities in general. More diverse mixes can be designed without major increase in cost by adding a mixture of low-priced, moderately-priced and high-priced species.
- List of planned species and rates must be generated with the Alabama Monarch Butterfly Seed Mixture Calculator (Excel spreadsheet). Work with a seed vendor or nursery to make decisions on the seed mix that best suits landowner objectives. Examples of seed mixtures are provided in the Alabama Monarch Butterfly Seed Mixture Calculator. There are many species mixture possibilities.
- Planting multiple species of Coreopsis or Rudbeckia should be avoided.
- Maintenance shall be completed on these areas beginning the second winter after establishment outside of the season when monarch larvae or adults are present. December and January are the best months to perform maintenance in Alabama. Some form of maintenance must be completed on all acres at least once every 3 years. The best regime is to implement maintenance on 1/3 of the acreage annually. Prescribed burning is the recommended form of maintenance, however, mowing high (12 inches) acceptable. Mowing could allow a duff layer to develop and potentially limit pollinator plant growth and survival. Therefore, if mowing is the main form of maintenance, then either fire or light disking must be used at least once every 3rd maintenance cycle to break the duff layer. Light disking means scratching the surface of the soil, but not going deeper than 3 inches at any one point.
- Spot spraying of invasives or unwanted vegetation is recommended but ensure herbicide label directions are followed.

*Some information was obtained from the South Carolina NRCS monarch butterfly habitat establishment job sheet.

Alabama Supplemental Guidance for CSP Enhancement

ATTACH COPIES OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTS AS NOTED BY THE ENHANCEMENT JOB SHEET. CHECK THE BOX OR OTHERWISE IDENTIFY THE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.

- MAPS OF THE AREA or LOCATION(S) WHERE THIS PRACTICE WAS APPLIED
- SEED INVOICE SHOWING TYPE AND AMOUNT PURCHASED FOR THIS PRACTICE.
- REPRESENTATIVE DIGITAL IMAGES/PHOTOS OF THE AREA AND INDICATE AREA ON MAP
- DATES OF COMPLETED ACTIVITY

The attached documents support the full implementation of this Conservation Stewardship Enhancement.

CSP Participant Name

Date