

## Native Grass Plantings Program Factsheet



**Purpose:** Native grass plantings are used to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and create or enhance wildlife habitat. Native grasses that grow well in Idaho are primarily cool season grasses. They grow best in the cool seasons of spring, early summer and fall. Native grasses are generally stiff, upright and primarily bunches that provide excellent nesting cover and stand up well to snow and provide good winter cover. Most native grasses are long-live species that establish slowly. Native grass communities are often associated with native forbs (wildflowers) and shrubs. The addition of legumes and forbs provides pollinator food sources and good seed and insect sources for young birds. The addition of shrubs provides pollinator food sources and good wildlife cover habitat.

**Where Practice Applies:** Native grasses are used primarily on rangeland and land being retired from agricultural production. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**CRP Policy:** If 50 points were awarded for the National Ranking Factor N1a, at least five (5) species including at least three (3) native grass species, plus at least one (1) forb, legume or shrub will be established. If 20 points were awarded for the National Ranking Factor, at least two (2) native grasses, plus at least one (1) forb or legume will be established.

**Selection of Species and Seeding Rates:** Species and seeding rates for native grasses, forbs, legumes and shrubs are found in Idaho Plant Materials Technical Note No. 24. Additional guidance can be found in the Idaho Conservation Cover (327) Specification of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG). Site-specific requirements will be listed in the ID-CPA-025 Seeding/Planting Plan Specification form. Pre-packaged mixes must be approved before seeding.

**Site Preparation:** Successful site preparation should begin the year before seeding. Existing cover must be eliminated by cultivation or herbicides. If spraying herbicide, work with the local Extension Specialist to determine the best herbicide combination and how to apply it properly. Follow the manufacturer's label rates and guidelines when applying herbicides. Perform weed control efforts prior to planting to increase the likelihood of a successful planting.

**Compliance:** Mixtures must be planted within 12 months of contract approval to remain in compliance. If circumstances beyond the landowner's control prohibit the planting within the first 12 months, the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committee may approve an extension to the next planting season.

Fertilizer application is not recommended for these plantings.

**Seeding:** Use of a drill is recommended. The drill used should provide depth control with bands or other suitable method such that seed placement depth does not exceed recommended depths expressed in Plant Materials Technical Note 24 for that species or seed mixture. Drill seeding rates shall be consistent with guidance in Plant Materials Technical Note 24.

Broadcast seeding will only be used on designated seedings or special situations. Broadcast seeding rates will be 150 to 200 percent of the normal drill seeding rates. When seed is broadcast planted, where possible, seed should be covered by a roll-type packer on mineral soil seedbeds. High residue seedbeds should be lightly dragged or raked.

Seeding rates on irrigated land may be increased to 150 to 200 percent of rates specified in Plant Materials Technical Note 24.

Actual seeding rates of applied seeding mixture will be within approximately 80 to 125 percent of rate specified during the planning process in the ID-CPA-025 Seeding/Planting Plan Specification.

**Seeding Dates:** Accepted planting dates are:

| MLRA | Spring*<br>(before) | Fall**<br>(before) | Dormant***<br>(after) |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 8    | 4/1                 | 10/1               | 11/15                 |
| 9    | 4/15                | 9/20               | 11/1                  |
| 10   | 5/15                | 9/10               | 10/20                 |
| 11   | 4/15                | 9/20               | 11/1                  |
| 12   | 5/15                | 9/20               | 11/1                  |
| 13   | 5/15                | 9/10               | 10/20                 |
| 25   | 5/15                | 9/10               | 10/20                 |
| 28A  | 5/1                 | 9/20               | 11/1                  |
| 43A  | 5/15                | 9/1                | 10/20                 |
| 43B  | 5/15                | 9/1                | 10/20                 |
| 43C  | 5/15                | 9/1                | 10/20                 |
| 44   | 5/15                | 9/1                | 11/1                  |
| 47   | 5/15                | 9/10               | 10/20                 |

Seeding dates may vary from these guidelines based on local experience and conditions.

\* Complete spring plantings as early as possible.

\*\* Fall seedings on irrigated land only.

\*\*\* Earlier dormant planting dates are ok if the measured soil temperature is below 45<sup>0</sup> F

Inoculate legume seed before seeding with the proper Rhizobia bacteria specific for the species. Re-inoculate seed if it was pre-inoculated more than 60 days prior to seeding.

**Seeding Protection and Weed Control:** This practice will be undertaken only where domestic grazing animals can be excluded to permit stand establishment. Temporary fencing may be required.

Noxious and competitive invasive weeds should be controlled by mowing, clipping or herbicides. Grass seedlings should be allowed to attain at least 4-5 leaf stage before herbicides are applied. Mowing and herbicides should be used to control unwanted vegetation until a final Status Review is issued. Mow when competing weeds are taller than the planted vegetation, and at a height above the planted vegetation. Grasses should not be mowed lower than six inches to ensure plant health.

**Operation and Maintenance:** After the Final Status Review, or three (3) years after planting, maintain

the planting according to your CRP Conservation Plan. Maintenance activities are required at least once during the contact to maintain stand health. Noxious weeds must be controlled. Additional information can be found in the Idaho Noxious Weed Guide ([www.idahoweedawareness.net](http://www.idahoweedawareness.net)).

**Maintenance:** Maintenance activities are not allowed from April 1 through August 1 to protect ground-nesting wildlife. If maintenance activities are needed, the FSA County Committee **must** approve the maintenance activity **prior to** the activity occurring. Maintenance activities will be conducted on a **“spot treatment” basis only.**

Exclude all acres from haying and grazing year round, unless authorized. Fences may need to exclude livestock. The contract area cannot be used for field roads or other uses that will damage or destroy the cover.

**Mid-Contract Management:** All CRP contracts must have mid-contract management activities scheduled that are site specific and ensure plant diversity, protect wildlife habitat, and also protect the soil and water resources. A few management activities that will ensure these benefits include integrated wildlife management, mowing, harrowing, discing, chiseling, prescribed burning (with an approved plan), seedbed preparation and reseeding. If woody species are present, planned activities should avoid practices that would damage the shrubs. All management activities must be performed according to NRCS Specifications as found in the FOTG and CRP policy. Existing CRP contracts may voluntarily have the contract modified to add Mid-Contract Management activities and cost-share with prior approval from the local FSA office.

**Managed Haying and Grazing:** These plantings may be used for managed haying or grazing. These activities must be performed according to NRCS Specifications and CRP policy. The same acreage may not be hayed or grazed more than once every five (5) years. Annual CRP rental payments will be reduced based on the value of the forage removed. All managed haying and grazing activities must be conducted outside of the primary nesting season (April 1 to August 1) and must be approved by FSA and included in the conservation plan prior to harvesting the forage.