Native grasses or legumes in forage base to improve plant community, structure and composition

Montana Clarification

The purpose of this enhancement is to establish native, perennial (herbaceous) plant species. The established stand should provide adequate structure and composition to enhance the quantity and quality of livestock forage and also wildlife habitat.

The resulting ground cover and root mass must also be sufficient to protect the soil from wind and water erosion. NRCS wind and water erosion prediction technologies should be used to document average annual soil erosion estimates before and after the enhancement is implemented.

A Montana NRCS WHEG (Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide) must be completed to identify the producer’s wildlife objectives, distinguish wildlife species for management and to document benchmark habitat conditions for those species. The WHEG must be completed and certified by and NRCS or partner biologist. Note: The total habitat score following implementation should equal .75 or greater.

Follow the Montana 550 Standard, Specification and Job sheet to design the seed mix and make planting recommendations. The selection of the seed mixture is critical to the success of the planting. Ecological sites and the associated HCPC plant species compositions are important to consider when designing a native planting. See the Montana Ecological Site Descriptions for guidance on target species composition.

Planners should also consider how the new seeding/s might enhance an existing or planned grazing system as well as wildlife habitat. For example, seed mixes should enhance forage production and consider livestock nutrition during times of the year when forage is limited and livestock nutrition requirements may not be met. Species should have similar palatability so that selective grazing is minimized following establishment.

Reference Montana NRCS Plant Material Technical Note 46 for species and cultivar selection and Range Technical Note 33 for seeding rates. Note: Seeding rates will be calculated on a pure live seed (PLS) basis.

Note: All seed and planting materials must meet state quality standards. Seed tags must be current. Plant materials should be adapted to local conditions. Consider the percent dormant seed when designing and scheduling native plantings and when planting native legumes, consider using the
proper strain of inoculant if it is available. If nutrients and/or soil amendments are planned, they must be applied according to a current soil test.

Consideration should be taken to minimize soil erosion and disturbance when establishing the stand by using techniques such as no-till planting, use of nurse crops that germinate quickly and/or the use of suitable erosion control practices. If a companion crop (nurse crop) is used, consider harvesting the crop early to reduce water stress on the new seeding.

During establishment, annual weed infestations may be clipped/mowed. Perennial weeds should be spot-treated for the life of the stand.

*Do not graze or hay the stand for a minimum of two growing seasons, until the plants have matured beyond the seedling stage and the stand is established.

Use plant density observations from multiple areas in the field(s) to confirm successful establishment two years from the planting date. Use Montana Conservation Planning Technical Note 5 (Revision 1) Evaluating Seeding Success for Pasture and Hay Planting (Code 512) and Range Planting (Code 550).

The acres that this enhancement is applied on must be incorporated in a prescribed grazing plan that considers wildlife. Reference Montana Standards, Specifications and Job Sheets for 528 (Prescribed Grazing) and 645 (Upland Wildlife Habitat Management).

**Montana Specifications and References:**

NRCS Montana Standards, Specifications, and Job Sheets 550 at: Montana, County, Section IV, Conservation Practices folder, Range Seeding folder.

Ecological Site Descriptions and/or Range Health Reference Sheets (if available) or Consult the NRCS Area Rangeland Management Specialist if an Ecological Site Description is not available.

Seeding Rates for Conservation Species for Montana (Plant Materials Tech Note MT-46)

Montana Species Suited to Planting by Ecological Site (Range Tech Note MT-33)

Evaluating Seeding Success for Forage and Biomass Planting and Range Planting (Conservation Planning Tech Note MT-5)

Montana Climate Data

WEPS and RUSLE software on field office computer
Montana NRCS WHEG (Biology Technical Note MT-19)

Montana Seed Standards

NRCS Montana Standard, Specification, and Job Sheet 528 and 645 at: Montana, County, Section IV, Conservation Practices folder, Prescribed Grazing folder.

The following Range and Pasture forms on MT NRCS website
  • Forage, Roughage, and Livestock Balance Worksheet (MT-ECS-18B)

**Incompatible Enhancements:** This enhancement is not compatible with E512132Z2, E512136Z2, E512140Z.

**Applicable Amount:** Applies to Pasture and Associated Ag Land.

**Documentation Requirements**

1. Completed and Certified MT WHEG
2. Completed 550, 528 and 645 job sheets.
3. Feed and forage balance worksheet
4. Map showing the field/s that were treated.
5. Seed tags (current), receipts, etc.
6. Photos documenting the seeding was seeded and established and that there is a healthy, productive stand of permanent, native vegetation.
7. NRCS wind and water erosion prediction technology documenting reductions in soil erosion.
8. Document of management following establishment. For example, a 528 grazing plan with monitoring records to document implementation.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand all that is required for the implementation of this CSP Enhancement Activity.

_________________________________  _______________________________
Contract Participant                     Date