

Buffers for Birds, Bees and Beetles

CP33 Buffers Can Provide Habitat for Wild Birds and Beneficial Insects



Cropland borders containing a combination of native grasses and wildflowers can provide habitat for birds like bobwhite quail while improving natural pollination services and farms' natural defenses against insect pests.

The CRP Continuous Signup allows enrollment of land in a practice called Upland Bird Habitat Buffer (CP33) at any time during the year. This program offers:

- Enrollment at any time
- Automatic acceptance for eligible land
- Eligibility for land owners and renters
- Cost-share for establishment and management
- 10-year land rental contracts
- Maintains agricultural use value

How Much Money's At Stake?

The CRP payment will be based on soil rental rate, signing incentive, maintenance payment, and practice incentive, if applicable.

Cost sharing for the required habitat management is also available.

The CRP contracts run for 10-years.

Who and What's Eligible?

Land owners or tenants may enroll in CRP. Land must have been cropped in at least four years during 1996 to 2001.

Ideal sites receive full sun and have good drainage.

Separation distance between habitat patches should not exceed 300 ft. to provide best results.

What's Expected?

The buffer must be protected from production of hay, forage, or crops, and participant's must prevent their use as turn rows, roads, or storage areas.

Any disturbance during the primary bird nesting season running from April 15th to September 1st must be prevented.

All enrolled buffers must have an average width between 30 and 120 feet. A whole field may not be enrolled.

Although managing fallow, volunteer vegetation strips is an acceptable option, establishing stands of mixed native grasses and wildflowers will maximize the habitat for birds and desirable insects. A sample planting specification is included on the back of this sheet.

Plant diversity and wildlife habitat must be actively managed to sustain the buffer's benefits. It is necessary to conduct one or more of the following management actions every year on 1/3 to 1/2 of the buffer:

- mowing and raking off the straw,
- prescribed burning,
- spot-killing undesirable woody plants and exotic grasses like tall fescue, Bermuda grass, and Bahia grass.

Buffer boundaries must always be identified by 1-inch by 5-foot (or larger) poles or pipes, driven at least 1-foot into the soil.

Want More Information?

To learn more about creating habitat for wildlife or beneficial insects visit a local NRCS office, or read *Manage Insects On Your Farm: A Guide to Ecological Strategies*, published by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program <http://www.sare.org>.

To enroll land in CRP, contact a local office of the USDA's Farm Service Agency.



Example Establishment Specifications

1. Establish Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds at locations indicated on the attached layout map, according to the specifications provided below.
2. Use pipes, or sticks to identify buffer edges, and provide “aiming sticks” for equipment operators.
3. Establish this planting to provide the habitat structure and complexity required by birds, pollinators and desirable predatory insects that nest or forage in early succession habitat close to agricultural land.

Plants Plant all species in a mix, or broadcast separately to create a mixed stand	Seeding Rate	Bloom Normally Begins	Bloom Can Last
Big bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>)	2 lbs. per acre	-	-
Indiangrass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	1 lbs. per acre	-	-
Butterflyweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	1 lb. per acre	June	30 days
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	1 lb. per acre	June	40 days
Common milkweed (<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>)	1 lb. per acre	July	30 days
Lance leaved coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>)	1 lb. per acre	July	30 days
Showy Goldenrod (<i>Solidago speciosa</i>)	1 lb. per acre	Sept	60 days
Heath Aster (<i>Aster pilosus</i>)	1 lb. per acre	Oct	40 days

4. Ideal planting time for all seed is the month of May. Broadcast seed on the surface of very finely-disked and firmly rolled (fully settled) conventional seedbed, then roll seed into the top 1/4 to 1/2 inch of topsoil. Do not rake in seed or apply fertilizer at planting time. Use of an herbicide to provides pre-emergent and post-emergent warm season weed control is usually desirable when this type of planting is made on cropland. All the species to plant from seed have some tolerance to the herbicide Imazapic (an active ingredient in Plateau, Journey and Impose). Where herbicide cannot be used mow to about 6 inches (not lower) each time the buffer vegetation reaches a height of 12-15 inches during the first growing season. Mowing up to 4 times during the first season may be necessary. Do not continue mowing during the second growing season.

Example Management Specifications

After establishment, this planting requires active management to stay productive. Begin management during the year of practice establishment using the following specification:

1. Control unwanted woody vegetation (like sweetgums and pines) and exotic grasses (like Bermuda grass, Johnson grass, Vasey grass and Bahia grass each year during the growing season. Keep the amount of trees and shrubs at or below 10% of the total canopy cover. Woody vines may comprise up to 25% of the total groundcover.
2. Prescribed burn, or mow and rake off the plant residue during Sept - Oct to sustain the plant diversity. Bush-hogging without raking off or burning off the straw will drive down wildflower diversity. Light disking will damage wildflowers' basal rosettes. Management that occurs during November through April 15th is allowed, however at that time, fewer seedlings will be recruited into the stand during the next growing season.

Example Maintenance Specifications

Each year of the contract you must ensure the practice is maintained according to the following specifications:

1. Replace damaged marker pipes, or sticks along the buffer edges.
2. Maintain the buffers' original width and length.
3. Protect buffers from disking, mowing, and fire during the nesting season (April 15th to September 1st).
4. Do not plant wildlife food plots in buffers.
5. Do not use buffers for production of hay, forage, or crops.
6. Do not use buffers for turn rows, roads, or storage areas for crops or equipment.
7. Inspect for erosion after major storms, remove accumulated sediment and re-grade washouts, stabilize repaired area by planting a small grain cover crop.