



I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent planting practices for Department of Conservation and Recreation (Department) lands, ensure that native species are used in plantings whenever possible, and provide guidance and information regarding how best to plant native grasses, forbs, shrubs, trees, and other flora, as well as information regarding non-native species that can be planted with caution on Department lands.

II. Scope

This policy applies to all Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) classified and wage employees, as well as other agency engaged workers, interns, temporary workers, volunteers, consultants, contractors, or other entities who have been contracted or authorized to perform work involving the procurement, planting, or maintenance of vegetation on behalf of the agency.

III. Definitions

Department Lands: Those lands owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, or lands for which the Department has management support responsibilities through signed agreement with a landowner, which includes vegetation plantings or management.

Invasive Plants: Non-native plants that cause, or are likely to cause, economic or ecological harm or harm to human health, as defined by Presidential Executive Order 13112. Invasive plants include any plants listed on the Virginia Invasive Plant Species List, administered by the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Division of Natural Heritage.

Native Plants: Those plants that are indigenous to specific regions, habitats, or ecosystems in Virginia. Such plants are dispersed throughout their natural range without known human involvement. Native plants generally have evolved and adapted to one or more specific locations and have remained genetically unaltered by humans. Native vegetation is well adapted to local features such as climate, soil, and water availability.

Non-Native Plants (alternately referred to as alien, exotic, or nonindigenous plants): Plants introduced by natural vectors such as wildlife, or more often by human action, intentionally or accidentally, into a region outside their natural geographic range. Such introductions may occur through various pathways,

including intentional transport for commercial purposes or accidental movement through international packing material or the ballast water of oceangoing vessels.

Noxious Weed: Any living plant, or part thereof, declared by the Board of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to be detrimental to crops, surface waters (including lakes), or other desirable plants, livestock, land, or other property, or to be injurious to public health, the environment, or the economy, except when in-state production of such living plant, or part thereof, is commercially viable or such living plant is commercially propagated in Virginia.

Planting: The deliberate act of introducing any plant material that is or can result in living plants into an area, including but not limited to the introduction of plant life for the purposes of landscaping, conservation and restoration projects, erosion and sediment control, or livestock forage.

IV. Statement of Policy

In all locations and through all operations and activities, the agency shall commit to prioritizing the use of native plants whenever possible in the course of conducting plantings on Department lands. The agency commits to take appropriate measures to control or remove non-native invasive species that currently exist on Department lands and avoid using species known to be invasive in the course of conducting future plantings. The agency further commits to use caution when introducing non-native plants to Department lands, to monitor their spread closely, and to work to eradicate planted populations swiftly if needed. The agency also commits to continually improving practices and procedures related to plantings on Department lands to promote sound ecological stewardship.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation will conduct itself to ensure compliance with all applicable environmental laws and regulations governing the introduction of plants to public lands. The agency recognizes that there are occasions, including but not limited to agricultural leases and specific erosion and sediment control efforts, when native species do not fully support the purpose of plantings on Department lands. The agency acknowledges that non-native species may be justified in certain limited situations, such as historic gardens or agricultural leases. The agency further recognizes that the purchase of all seed stock for plantings by the agency, whether native or non-native species are procured, must be done according to the Virginia Public Procurement Act requirements.

V. Procedures

Management procedures for planting projects on Department lands are as follows:

A. Planning Phase

1. Planting projects must be reviewed and approved by State Park Resource Managers or Natural Area Preserve Regional Stewards for Department lands within their respective divisions.
2. Anticipate ordering seed well in advance to ensure seed availability; this may be several months or more before planting. The best time to purchase native seed is in the Fall to ensure the supplier has enough in stock for Spring plantings. Be sure to specify pure live seed when ordering native seed. Pure live seed factors in germination rates to ensure the amount of seed of an individual species is

used to achieve adequate cover. Planting project managers should use local genotypes to the extent possible.

3. When choosing species for a seed mix, attempt to use species representative of the project area and consider the management objectives (wildlife opening, road corridor, revegetation, recreational use, ease of maintenance, erosion and sediment control) for the site. Staff should plan for long-term maintenance of the species selected.
4. If a plant intended for use is listed on the Virginia Invasive Plant Species list, then the site manager or other staff person in charge of seed procurement should first have the proposed planting reviewed by the relevant State Parks Resource Manager or Natural Area Preserve Regional Steward. If needed after review, the site manager, Resource Manager, or Regional Steward should work with the Division of Natural Heritage to identify any possible alternative native species that would serve the same resource management function.
5. For erosion and sediment control planting projects, the Department of Environmental Quality has developed a list of frequently asked questions regarding the use of native species and a list of suitable native plant alternatives to invasive species commonly used for erosion and sediment control.
6. Plants listed on the Noxious Weeds list maintained by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall not be planted on Department lands under any circumstances.
7. Where ground disturbing activity occurs within a floodplain, a floodplain management permit may be required from the Dam Safety and Flood Preparedness Division per State Floodplain Standards. Ground disturbance is defined as any activity that compacts or disturbs the ground within a project area where activities will occur. Projects that have been determined to have an insignificant effect on flooding characteristics and water conveyance are considered minor soil disturbing projects and may be exempt from the State Floodplain Standards permitting requirement. Minor soil disturbing projects include landscaping, gardening, and farming that does not involve filling, grading, or excavating.

B. Site Preparation and Planting Phase

1. Lime and fertilizer are not generally recommended for native seed mixes. If lime and fertilizer are used, be sure to reduce the nitrogen content. Excess Nitrogen can promote invasive plant species, potentially kill or inhibit the germination of native seed, alter soil pH and degrade important soil microfaunal communities.
2. Use straw, not hay, whenever possible under procurement guidelines to reduce the potential for introduction of weed seed. Invasive seed can also be introduced from contaminated fill material or seeders. Be sure equipment used for seeding is clean and free of any seed used previously whether on or off Department lands.
3. When determining light and moisture requirements for native species used in planting projects, staff can utilize the Virginia Native Plant Finder tool developed by the Division of Natural Heritage

or the agency's guidance documents on Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration and Landscaping.

C. Maintenance of Planting Sites

1. Staff should check the site throughout the growing season for problematic weeds or invasive plant species encroachment and spot treat as necessary.
2. Planting sites that mature to the point that mowing, cutting, prescribed burning, or other maintenance is required should be cut no lower than 4", as cutting below this height may result in harm to the development of native seedlings.

VI. Responsibilities

Employees with management and supervisory responsibilities for Department lands are responsible within their respective divisions and work units for:

1. Ensuring that subordinate managers, supervisors, and staff participating in the procurement and planting of seed stock and the maintenance of planted areas receive appropriate training on the use of native and non-native species and the control of invasive species.
2. Encouraging the prioritization of native species over alternative options by subordinate managers, supervisors, and staff when plantings are conducted on Department lands.
3. Ensuring that seed stock of plants that may have invasive tendencies, which includes plants on the Virginia Invasive Plant Species list, are avoided if at all possible. No species classified as a noxious weed by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall be planted on Department lands. If a species intended for planting is on the Virginia Invasive Plant Species list, or is otherwise known to have invasive tendencies, employees should first have the proposed species reviewed by State Park Resource Managers or Natural Area Preserve Regional Stewards and seek out viable alternatives, if available.
4. Ensuring that any plantings on Department lands, which include seed stock of plants that have invasive tendencies or which are listed on the Virginia Invasive Plant Species List, are monitored by subordinate managers, supervisors, and staff to control unintentional spread. The Division of State Parks Resource Managers or the Division of Natural Heritage Natural Area Preserve Regional Stewards may provide technical assistance in recommending appropriate control and monitoring measures for invasive species.
5. Ensuring the consistent application of this policy on Department Lands
6. Sharing this policy with other local, state, and federal partners to guide vegetation plantings or management on their owned and managed lands, as applicable or as requested.

VII. Related Documents and Resources

- [Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan, 2018 Revision](#)
- [Virginia Native Plant Finder](#)
- [Virginia Native Plant Society Nurseries List](#)
- [Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration, and Landscaping](#)
- [FAQ: Native vs. Invasive Plant Species for Erosion and Sediment Control](#)
- [Virginia Invasive Plant Species List](#)
- [Managing Invasive Plants in Natural Areas, Parks, and Small Woodlands](#)
- [Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Noxious Weeds List](#)
- [Presidential Executive Order 13112](#), (Feb 3, 1999)

Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed and revised accordingly as dictated by changes in state or federal laws, state policy, or as agency business needs necessitate. Recommended Lead Unit: Operations.

NOTE: Any revision to this policy or revision to the procedures and forms associated with this policy must be made pursuant to DCR Policy #100: SECTION: General Administration; SUBSECTION: Departmental Policy and Procedures Management.

Approval Signature

This policy will remain in effect until otherwise rescinded or revised by written policy. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved in advance and in writing by the Agency Director.

1/s/ Clyde E. Cristman

Clyde E. Cristman, Director
Department of Conservation and Recreation

August 20, 2021

Signature Date

Policy Revision History

Issued:	08/20/2021	New Policy
Revised:		