

## **BMP 52.00 & 53.00. Permanent Seeding and Soil Amendments**

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### DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

#### *Objectives*

Permanent Seeding is an erosion control measure intended to establish a perennial vegetation cover and provide full stabilization of a disturbed area. Protecting the soil with well-established perennial stands of grass, or other forms of vegetation, is one of the most effective methods of reducing erosion.

Soil amendments are commonly used in conjunction with Permanent Seeding to improve the soil. Application of the appropriate soil amendment(s) should reduce the potential for soil erosion and restore the health of the soil by improving soil structure. Amending the soil structure will improve the soil's water-holding capacity; and improve the infiltration rate and the ability to support vegetation.

#### *Description*

Permanent Seeding is applied to areas where construction has permanently ceased. The seed mix should be composed of several species and designed to establish a permanent perennial stand of vegetation that can survive in the area. Permanent Seeding should be accompanied by surface preparation, surface roughening, fertilizers, and mulch. Surface preparation and roughening enhance seed retention and germination, fertilizer boosts initial growth, and mulch retains moisture.

Soil amendments include topsoil, compost, shredded bark or wood chips, peat, biofertilizers, and mycorrhizae. Most soil amendments, except biofertilizers and mycorrhizae, should be tilled or blended into the soil.

#### *Other Names*

Permanent Seed Stabilization, Seeding with Soil Amendments, Compost Blanket with Seeding, Bonded Fiber Matrix with Seeding, Topsoil, and Seed.

#### *Applicability*

Permanent Seeding is a final stabilization measure that is generally required for all disturbed areas that are not otherwise stabilized (by paving, structures, landscaping, etc.). It should be completed in areas where ground disturbing activities have permanently ceased.

Seeding with soil amendments provides an additional control where the soil needs to be treated to support a stabilized vegetative mat. Soil amendments should be provided in areas where the soil is highly erodible and/or has poor nutrient content or structure. For example, a sandy soil needs organic matter added in order to increase the water and nutrient holding capacity.

#### *Selection Considerations*

- *Seed:* The designer should specify appropriate seed species based on the climatic and environmental conditions. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Plant Material Center manuals provide guidance for revegetation in Alaska, and include the *Revegetation Manual for Alaska, Interior Alaska Revegetation and Erosion Control Guide*, and the *Coastal Revegetation and Erosion Control Guide*. These manuals give recommended seeding species and planting dates. The dates to apply seed are dependent on the climatic conditions of the project location. These dates should be provided in the special provisions for each project.
- *Soil Amendments:* Soil amendments should be selected to increase the infiltration rate of water; improve the soil's fertility, texture, and structure; aid in the uptake of nutrients; help to stabilize the soil; aid in seed germination; increase microbial activity; and promote vegetation establishment.

When considering a soil amendment, the designer should consider how the amendment will improve the soil properties; such as the organic content and textural class, how long the amendment must remain in the soil, and the climate and ecology of the area

#### *Relationship to Other Erosion and Sediment Control Measures*

With or without soil amendments, seeding can be used alone but it is likely that other measures should be considered to protect and support seed establishment. Construction stormwater management control measures should be used up-gradient to prevent potential washouts. Sediment

control measures should be used to prevent the release of sediments to and from the treated area.

### *Design*

*Seed Selection and Application Rate:* Seed mix species should be carefully considered for each project. Several mixes may be applicable for a project depending on proximity to wetlands, roadways, and various microclimates in the general environment. The Alaska Plant Materials Center can assist with selecting species for all types of environments found in Alaska. Typically, seeds are applied at 20 - 40 lbs./acre, although site-specific conditions can affect how much seed needs to be applied. Add 30 percent to the quantity if surface roughening is required.

*Fertilizer and Application Rate:* Fertilizer should be used when establishing new seed. It is best to test the soils for existing nutrient content and pH to determine the appropriate fertilizer. If testing cannot be done until slopes are finished, then require a fertilizer application rate of 450 lb./acre of 20-20-10 (percent nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) as an interim placeholder in the bid documents and the Engineer should adjust the fertilizer rate based on the test results.

*Mulch:* Mulch should be used when establishing new seed. Mulch helps to hold the seed to the soil surface and helps to retain moisture during seed germination. The application rate for mulching during seeding is approximately 2,000 to 4,500 lbs./acre, depending on the steepness of slopes. On slopes steeper than 3:1, tackifier should be added to the mulch (BMP 57).

*Soil Stabilizer.* For steeper slopes or more erodible soils, hydraulic erosion control products (HECP, BMP 51) can be considered for additional soil stabilization.

*Soil Testing:* This is recommended when there is uncertainty regarding the fertilizer application rate or when there are risk factors for successful grass growth. It is possible to require the contractor to sample soils, but it may be preferable to have trained Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) staff collect soil samples for laboratory analyses. If it is feasible to test the soils for their pH and nutrients, then the Project Engineer is able to change the fertilizer requirement according to the test results. The existing soil or imported

topsoil can be tested to identify the soil's composition of organic matter, macro nutrients, soil texture, and pH. For more information, contact the regional stormwater specialist. Add a special provision if you determine that the contractor should test the soil once graded.

*Soil Amendment Options:* There are many different soil amendments in addition to fertilizer that can be applied to a project. Selecting a soil amendment can depend on location of a project and availability of the amendment. These soil amendments include the following:

- *Topsoil:* When used as a soil amendment, topsoil should be tilled or blended into the existing soil.
- *Compost:* Compost should comply with the U.S. Composting Council Testing Methods and with specified gradation for each project. Compost can be applied to almost any soil. Compost can be used in wet climates or in the wet season, whereas topsoil or other soil amendments may be prone to erosion. When used as a soil amendment, compost should be tilled or blended into the existing soil.
- *Shredded Bark or Wood Chips:* Although the composition of bark or wood chip will vary per application, material should not contain any materials that would inhibit or stunt vegetation growth. All material should be kept moist prior to the application of seed. When used as a soil amendment, shredded bark or wood chips should be tilled or blended into the existing soil before seeding.
- *Peat:* Peat can be used as a soil amendment when the existing soil texture is sandy. Application of peat will enhance the existing soil by providing organics and increase the water holding capacity. Peat may be applied to the surface or tilled or blended into the soil. It should be applied at a thickness of 1 to 2 inches and, if specified, tilled or blended into the top 4 to 6 inches of the existing soil. When tilled or blended in, the peat composition should be approximately 15 to 25 percent of the soil.

Peat is naturally acidic. The existing soil should be tested for pH levels so the appropriate quantities of peat can be applied. Over-

application could result in limited growth of some seed species.

- **Biofertilizers and Mycorrhizae:** Biofertilizers and mycorrhizae are soil amendments that can be used to increase the success and shorten the establishment period of vegetation. When applied, biofertilizers and mycorrhizae help to rebuild living soil that has become damaged during earthwork. Biofertilizers and mycorrhizae help to increase microbial activity in soil resulting in increased nutrient availability to plant roots.

#### *Common Failures or Misuses*

Common failures are generally due to faulty application and maintenance. These failures include:

- Seed and slurry mix is not applied with a multi-directional flow or is applied at an inadequate application rate, resulting in non-uniform coverage or stabilization.
- The mulch, tackifier, or HECF (including bonded fiber matrix) used is inadequate to hold seed on slopes, resulting in erosion and washouts.
- Temporary seed, if not appropriately removed, may inhibit growth of permanent grass.
- Seed is not properly or adequately irrigated.
- Seed is floated away due to over-irrigation or by excessive rainfall.
- Seeded areas are disturbed by foot traffic and/or equipment after installation.
- Treated areas are compacted after the seed and amendments are applied.
- Soil amendments are inadequate to support seed growth.
- Supportive Construction Water Management or Sediment Control best management practices (BMPs) are not installed or maintained correctly.
- Fertilizer application is inadequate.
- Fertilizers with high, or quick-release, phosphorus content are used with biofertilizer and mycorrhizal soil amendments.

- Fungicides are used on or around areas that have received biofertilizers and mycorrhizal amendments.
- Inadequate quantities of amendments containing biofertilizers and mycorrhizae are applied.
- Seeding is applied too late in the season, resulting in limited growth and germination prior to freeze up.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

##### Standard Specifications

- 652 - Soil Amendments
- 650 - Compost Blanket
- 651 - Hydraulic Erosion Control Products
- 620 - Topsoil
- 712.201 - Water
- 724 - Seed
- 725 - Fertilizer
- 752 – Tackifier
- 750 – Compost
- 753 – Soil Amendments
- 751 Hydraulic Erosion Control Products