

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

FUEL BREAK

**(Ac.)
CODE 383**

DEFINITION

A strip or block of land on which the vegetation, debris and detritus have been reduced and/or modified to control or diminish the risk of the spread of fire crossing the strip or block of land.

PURPOSE

Control and reduce the risk of the spread of fire by treating, removing or modifying vegetation, debris and detritus.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to rangeland and forestland where the goal is to reduce risks caused by wildfire by:

- reducing the amount of flammable material that could be consumed by a wildfire
- increasing safety and effectiveness of fire suppression operations.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes

A fuel break should be in strips or blocks that are sufficient width and length depending on fuel type.

Fuel breaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources and structures being protected. They shall connect natural or preexisting fuel breaks or areas of low fire hazard (such as rivers, washes, trails, or roads) to maximize their effectiveness.

Thin the overstory stand and understory sufficiently to reduce the tree canopy and the potential of a crown fire.

Maintain vertical separation between fuel layers by thinning or removing the understory and by pruning lower branches. I.e., reduce ladder fuels: ensure that the lowest layers of flammable vegetation do not connect to upper layers so that a fire cannot "step up" to higher canopies.

Treat or remove slash sufficiently and at a time to minimize fuel loadings to acceptable fire risk levels and reduce incidence of harmful insects and disease. Comply with Slash Treatment, 384.

Manage grasses and forbs to minimize fine fuels.

Establish fire-resistant vegetation to further decrease the risk of the spread of fire.

CONSIDERATIONS

Attempt to locate fuel breaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms. Fuel breaks should be located perpendicular to the wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

Prescribed grazing may be used as a management tool to reduce understory fine fuels.

Slash produced in the establishment of a fuel break that is not removed from the site will be treated or arranged to enhance wildlife habitat.

Select plant species that will enhance the needs of desired wildlife in the area.

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Design and layout should include enhancement of multiple uses, including the establishment of a defensible zone around a home (<http://www.nmfireinfo.com/>).

Consider beneficial and other effects of installation of the fuel break on cultural resources and threatened and endangered species, natural areas, and wetlands.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan and the burn plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Treat or graze vegetative fuel breaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control noxious and invasive plants.

Inspect all fuel breaks for woody materials such as dead limbs or blown down trees and remove or treat as necessary to maintain the desired level of fire spread risk.

Inspect fuel breaks at frequencies to assure that the desired level of fire spread risk is maintained.

Maintain the functionality of the original design throughout the life of the practice.

REFERENCES

Certain information in this standard and in the specifications document was gleaned from sources (written and oral) of NM State Forestry, USDA Forest Service, DOI National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

Forest Fire: Control and Use, Kenneth P. Davis. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc, New York, 1959.

Fuelbreaks and Other Fuel Modifications for Wildland Fire Control, Agriculture Handbook No. 499, USDA-Forest Service, 1977.

Guidelines and Criteria for Wildfire Hazard Areas, Colorado State Forest Service and Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, 1974.

Vollmer, Jennifer. New Technology for Fuel Breaks and Green Strips in Urban Interface and Wildland Areas. Eighth International Wildland Fire Safety Summit, Missoula, Montana April 26-28, 2005.

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Agee, et. al. The Use of Fuelbreaks in Landscape Management.