

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

FIREBREAK

(Ft.)

CODE 394

DEFINITION

A permanent or temporary strip of bare or vegetated land planned to retard fire.

PURPOSE

- Reduce the spread of wildfire.
- Contain prescribed burns.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on all land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and shall consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination of these.

Firebreaks will be of sufficient width and length to contain the expected fire behavior.

Firebreaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected, including locating on the contour where practical to minimize risk of soil erosion.

Erosion control measures, such as waterbars, turn-out ditches, seeding/vegetation/mulching, etc. shall be installed to prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Install waterbars and water turnouts at approaches to streams, roads and gullies.

Constructed firebreaks may tie into existing natural or manmade barriers and should not direct drainage/sediment into natural waterways. Firebreaks should be located on ridge tops, on the contour, and through the forest at intervals appropriate for control resources. When firebreaks cannot be installed on the contour, use a gradual grade. Install water bars with water turnouts according to GA BMP 4.4.1.

Use hand tools or back blade firebreaks away from the edge for streams, roads or gullies.

Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks will be noninvasive and capable of retarding fire.

Where possible, use natural barriers such as roads, streams, and fields and firebreaks.

Four types of firebreaks can be used in Georgia. They are 1) access roads, 2) vegetated firebreaks, 3) either plowed or disked firebreaks and, 4) natural barriers. Plowed or disked firebreaks should be limited to soils with slight erosion hazard. Access roads, vegetated firebreaks, and plowed/disked firebreaks may be used on any soils provided erosion control measures such as water breaks or broad-based drainage dips are used when erosion hazard is moderate to severe. Access roads used for fire breaks should be vegetated on soils that have a moderate to severe erosion hazard.

Specific Criteria for Access Roads.

Existing access roads can serve as effective firebreaks if properly maintained. All burnable material should be removed from the roads in early spring and fall just before the fire seasons.

New roads should be constructed to provide protection from fire and to provide access for harvesting forest products. Aerial photographs, contour maps, and soil maps should be used in locating new roads. Roads should not be located along streams and in natural depressions. See 560-Access Road.

Where possible, "day light" the forest roads by clearcutting 30-50ft on each side. This will achieve optimum sunlight on the road which will encourage grass/shrub wildlife habitat and help dry roads. Maintain grass or shrub vegetation by mowing and/or burning.

Road beds used for firebreaks may be vegetated to reduce erosion and enhance wildlife habitat. A seedbed should be prepared by disking, and lime and fertilizer should be applied according to a soil test. Firebreaks may be over seeded each fall with either legumes, small grains or ryegrass.

Specific Criteria for Vegetated Firebreaks

Firebreaks can be constructed by bulldozing, plowing or disking and then vegetated to either perennial grasses or perennial grasses and legumes. Vegetated firebreaks may be over seeded each fall with legumes, small grains, or ryegrass. Vegetated firebreaks should be at least 10 feet wide and may be used for access. Vegetated firebreaks should be limed and fertilized periodically and reseeded when necessary.

Specific Criteria for Disked Firebreaks

Either plowed or disked firebreaks can be constructed with a variety of equipment. The desired result is a bare area at least 8 feet wide, free of burnable material, and located so that erosion is kept to a minimum. Plowed or disked firebreaks should be limited to areas

with slight erosion hazard. Firebreaks should be either plowed or disked to remove all burnable material before the fire season or planted prescribed burn.

Specific Criteria for Natural Firebreaks

These are natural barriers that prohibit the fire from crossing into areas where fire is not planned. Such areas include: lakes, streams, ponds, roads, cultivated fields and railroads.

CONSIDERATIONS

When using barriers consider the effects on wildlife and fisheries.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms.

If winds are predictable, firebreaks should be located perpendicular to the wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

Consider the selection of plant species that will enhance the needs of wildlife in the area.

Locate on the contour where practicable to minimize risk of soil erosion.

Design and layout should include multiple uses.

Consider the beneficial and other effects of installation of the firebreak on cultural resources and threatened and endangered species, natural areas, riparian 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

Mow, disk, or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds. Treatment should be timed to reduce impacts to nesting when possible.

Inspect all firebreaks for woody materials such as dead limbs or blown down trees and remove them from the firebreak.

Inspect firebreaks at least annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of flammable vegetation.

Repair erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Access by vehicles or people will be controlled to prevent damage.

Bare ground firebreaks, which are no longer needed, will be stabilized.

REFERENCES

Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry 1999 Georgia Forestry Commission publication.