

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
VIRGINIA 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.

Firebreaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected.

Erosion control measures shall be installed to prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Existing forest roads or trails can be effective firebreaks if properly maintained. Abandoned roads or trails should be renovated and erosion should be controlled. Expose mineral soil where needed prior to the critical fire season.

Debris and other flammable materials should be removed.

Plowed, disked, or bladed firebreaks should be constructed to expose mineral soil. Depending upon the terrain and character of vegetation to be removed; fireline plows, heavy bush and bog disks, or farm equipment should be utilized.

Vegetated firebreaks shall be a minimum of 30 feet wide adjoining forestland, and 50 feet wide within forests. The land should be prepared and seeded with an adapted grass and/or an adapted legume. Use cool season forages only.

Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks will be noninvasive and capable of retarding fire. Select species from the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide.

CONSIDERATIONS

Use barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, field borders, skid trails, landings, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-ways, cultivated land, or other areas as existing firebreaks. Electric lines can be hazardous in heavy smoke as they may conduct electricity.

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 using diverse species combinations which best meet locally native wildlife and

pollinator needs.

Locate on the contour where practical 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

Requirements for Operations and Maintenance of 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, burning plan or other acceptable documentation.

A written burn plan must be prepared by a Certified Burn Manager who has completed the VDOF burning certification program. Refer to the Virginia Conservation Practice Standard *Prescribed Burning* (Code 338) for more information.

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

VA Plant Establishment Guide. Virginia eFOTG, Section II.

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