

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

Firebreak

(Feet)

Code 394

DEFINITION

A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire.

PURPOSES

- To Prevent the spread of wildfire
- To control prescribed burns

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

All land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

CRITERIA

Planned work shall comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations.

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

The minimum width of a firebreak shall be 15 feet or 3 times the height of the available fuel, whichever is greater.

Areas planned for prescribed fire shall have firebreaks on all sides.

Use existing barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, drainage ditches,

railroads, skid trails, landings, utility right of ways and cultivated land as natural firebreaks.

Cool season grasses and/or legumes maybe seeded to establish permanent fire breaks. Use one of the following:

Grass Only Firebreak (Select one of the following species)

Species	Rate
Kentucky Bluegrass	5 lbs. per acre PLS ¹
Orchardgrass	10 lbs. per acre PLS
Smooth Bromegrass	20 lbs. per acre PLS

¹ PLS = Pure Live Seed

Legume Only Firebreak² (Select one of the following species) All rates are PLS

Species	Rate
Alsike Clover	4 lbs. per acre
Ladino Clover	2 lbs. per acre
Red Clover	10 lbs. per acre
Birdsfoot Trefoil	8 lbs. per acre

² Legume mixes are acceptable. Reduce seeding rates by 50% when two or more legumes are seeded.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Grass / Legume Mix Firebreak (Select **one** grass and **one** legume) All rates are PLS

Grass Species	Rate	Legume Species	Rate
Kentucky Bluegrass	3 lbs. per acre	Ladino Clover	1 lbs. per acre
Orchardgrass	8 lbs. per acre	Red Clover	5 lbs. per acre
Smooth Bromegrass	15 lbs. per acre	Alsike Clover	2 lbs. per acre

All legume seed shall be pre-inoculated or be inoculated at time of seeding. If the pre-inoculant date is over 60 days old, re-inoculate before seeding.

Lime and fertilize according to a recent soil test (soil test taken within the last three years)

Seeding Date Criteria

Species/Mix	IN seeding Dates	Dormant seeding dates**
Cool Season grasses	3/1-5/15 or 8/1-9/15	12/1-3/1
Legumes	3/1-5/15 or 8/1-9/15	12/1-3/1

**Increase seeding rates by 25% when dormant seeding.

Bare ground firebreaks will not exceed tolerable soil loss limits. Avoid creating bare ground firebreaks on erosive slopes.

Bare ground firebreaks created prior to the burn by plowing and/or discing shall remove all vegetation, roots and combustible material. Bare ground firebreaks that are temporary will be reseeded to an appropriate cover after the burn.

Mowing or discing a permanent grass/legume firebreaks should be done in late summer or early fall, the year before completing a prescribed burn. Time the mowing or discing to occur outside the primary ground nesting period for grassland birds (April 1 through August 1).

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider multiple uses when designing and laying out firebreaks.

Consider using firebreaks to divide prescribed burning areas into manageable units of no more than 1/3 of the field.

Locate firebreaks on the contour, where possible to minimize the risk of erosion.

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.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mow or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of dead litter and to control weeds. Prior to a prescribed burn, all permanent vegetative firebreaks shall be free of grass clippings and combustible material.

Inspect and rework erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Control access to the firebreak to prevent damage by vehicles, people and livestock.

Inspect annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them void of flammable vegetation. Re-seed bare ground firebreaks if necessary to control erosion.

Inspect for and remove woody materials such as dead limbs and blown down trees from firebreaks.

Allow legumes to develop seed heads before mowing at least every other year.

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