

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE SPECIFICATION GUIDE SHEET**

**FIREBREAK**

(FT)

**CODE 394**

For the purpose of containing prescribed burns, follow the specification requirements in the certified/approved prescribed burn plan.

For the purpose of reducing the spread of wildfire follow the specifications as outlined below:

**LOCATION**

Where possible locate the firebreak across general slope, at right angles to prevailing winds, or adjacent to highways, permanent logging roads, or boundaries. Avoid steep grades particularly those in excess of 10 percent.

Utilize natural barriers as much as possible such as ridge tops, wetlands, open land, roads, and trails, less hazardous timber types and streams.

**CONSTRUCTION**

**Firebreaks on All Land Except Blueberry land:**

1. Remove all woody and low-grading inflammable vegetation and debris from a strip of land equal in width to the highest of the adjacent trees but not less than 25 feet. In specific areas of high hazard or to protect a special area, expose a continuous strip of mineral soil by burning, plowing, harrowing, bulldozing, or proper use of herbicides.<sup>1/</sup> Bare ground width may vary from 10 to 25 feet or more. This work may be repeated to meet the seasonal growth of weeds, etc. Where erosion may be a problem, waterbars, culverts, and other water control structures alone or in combination with low growing green herbaceous vegetation may be used.

2. Consult with qualified Cooperative Extension Service personnel on appropriate use of herbicides. Follow labeled directions and use only as directed.

**Firebreaks on Blueberry land:**

1. Firebreaks will be constructed as above but with a minimum width of 10 feet when adjacent to blueberry land. Use minimum width of 25 feet between blueberry land and woodland.

**Blueberry land Firebreak Maintenance:**

1. Sections of firebreaks protected by grasses and other herbaceous cover will be mowed to reduce accumulation of fuel. The most effective time to mow is at the end of the growing season. This will result in a green growth of grass in the early spring with little fuel available during the blueberry season. When fields are burned in the fall, vegetated sections of the firebreak will be mowed about 1 week or less before burning. More frequent mowing may be necessary to avoid accumulation of organic matter.
2. Prior to burning, vegetated firebreaks will be plowed or roto-tilled to expose a strip of mineral soil at least 10 feet wide. Remaining vegetative cover on the firebreak will be mowed to a height of less than 4" to reduce height and amount of fuel.
3. Exposed mineral soil in high erosion hazard areas of the firebreak will be reseeded within 10 days of the burn with appropriate seed mixture for the site conditions. Lime, fertilizer, and mulch may be required to provide quick establishment of vegetative cover.

4. High risk erosion areas which have been seeded will be protected from damage by herbicides.

#### **All Land Firebreak Maintenance:**

1. Inspect annually before each fire season or prescribed burn and remove fallen trees, dry vegetation, and other inflammable debris.
2. In high hazard areas it will be necessary to maintain established firebreaks by exposing strips of mineral soil through annual plowing, harrowing, roto-tilling, bulldozing, or careful use of approved herbicides. The Cooperative Extension Service and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection will be consulted for guidelines on using herbicides.
3. Sod firebreaks will be mowed to a height of 4" or less every 2 to 3 weeks to maintain moist green vegetation.
4. Whenever possible, construct and maintain firebreaks in such a manner as to serve as emergency roads for fire suppression crews and equipment. Permanent logging and farm roads are a part of a system of good firebreaks. Keep the road out of intermittent or perennial stream channels and wetlands.

#### **EROSION CONTROL**

##### **Water Bars:**

Provide waterbars or other kinds of diversions to reduce erosion and provide for surface drainage by the following guide:

For spacing of waterbars, see Standard and Specifications for Forest Trails and Landings, Code 655.

Construct sediment basins at the base of slopes where stream and wetland siltation is a problem.

#### **VEGETATION**

Sections of firebreaks with a high erosion hazard or potential sediment source to streams, ponds, or wetlands will be seeded with an appropriate mixture of grasses and legumes from Critical Area Planting (342), Table 1.

#### **DOCUMENTATION**

All land uses require the following design information:

1. Landowner and Design Preparer name and address
2. Property Location, including town and county, and NRCS Field Office
3. Practice name, code, justification, amount, estimated cost, and time schedule.
4. Description of specific work to be performed and its location and size, as well as written instructions for contractor and /or owner.
5. Maps of property and practice locations, including a lat/long for boundary corners and practices.
6. Legal Obligations, including tax status and required permits if needed.

The Firebreak practice design, installation and checkout shall include detailed written description, map and practice layout/as-built including:

1. Location of firebreaks (Lat./ Long.)
2. Total length, width, and acreage proposed and as-built
3. Detailed specifications, modifications and as-builts including type of vegetation planted if required, erosion control proposed and actually installed, and maintenance requirements.
4. Specifications for the protection of other natural resources including but not limited to water, soil, wildlife, and non-target plants.