**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 and debris.

## CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on all land where protection from wildfire is needed.

## CRITERIA

### General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes

Fuel breaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources and structures being protected.

Fuel breaks are areas where trees have been thinned and the understory canopy has been removed to the extent that a wild fire will not get into the crowns of large trees.

Fuel break strips or blocks should be of sufficient width and length to meet the intended purposes. The minimum width of the fuel break will be 66 feet.

The overstory should be thinned to sufficiently separate the tree canopies and eliminate the potential of a crown fire. Increase the spacing distance by 1/3 more than recommended with the D + X spacing in the Oklahoma NRCS Forest Stand Improvement (666) standard.

Maintain vertical separation between fuel layers in the canopies by removing “ladder” fuels. Remove all of the shrub species from 1.5 to 4.5 feet tall.

All trees exceeding 20 feet in height will have the lower limbs pruned to a minimum height of 8 feet. This will be done according to the Oklahoma NRCS Tree/Shrub Pruning (660) standard.

Remove slash to minimize fuel loadings to acceptable fire risk levels and reduce incidence of harmful insects and disease. Comply with the Oklahoma NRCS Forest Slash Treatment (384) standard.

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. If winds are predictable, fuel breaks can 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 the height of understory vegetation.

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. Thinning the trees will increase the grass cover which will control soil erosion and increase the number of forbs that are a beneficial food source for wildlife.

Design and layout should include enhancement of multiple uses.

Consider beneficial and other effects of installation of the fuel break on cultural resources, 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 them to lessen the fire spread risk.

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

**REFERENCES**

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.