

FIREBREAK**394****Conservation Practice Fact Sheet****DEFINITION**

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

PURPOSE

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

BENEFITS

1. Protection from destructive wildfires.
2. Reduced damages to residual forest stand.
3. Prevention of accidental damage to neighboring properties during a prescribed burn.

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WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

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

LOCATION OF FIREBREAKS

Locate firebreaks parallel to forest boundaries and to public roads and railroads that are adjacent to forest boundaries. Firebreaks can also be located within forest boundaries where necessary for forest management activities.

Locate firebreaks on the contour where possible to minimize risk of soil erosion. When firebreaks cannot be installed on the

contour, use a gradual grade. The firebreaks should be located near ridge crests and valley bottoms.

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

EROSION CONTROL MEASURE

Back blade firebreaks away from the edge of streams, roads, or gullies.

Install water bars and water turnouts at approaches to streams, roads, and gullies to prevent channeling water from firebreaks into these areas.

Spacing of Wing Ditches:

Gradient (% Slope)	Interval (Feet)
2 – 5	200
5 – 10	100
>10	75

Spacing of Water Bars:

Gradient (% Slope)	Interval (Feet)
1	400
2	245
5	125
10	78
15	58
20	47
25	40
30	35
35	32

Refer to [Arkansas Best Management Practice Guidelines for Silviculture](#) for further design considerations and diagrams.

Protect the discharge area of these water management measures with stone, grass sod, brush, logging debris, or other materials that will reduce the velocity of the runoff and control scouring.

Clean Tilled Firebreaks

Clean-tilled firebreaks must be wide enough to afford maximum protection from wildfires during average fire danger. They will be approximately 15 feet wide with no part less than 10 feet wide. The desired result is a bare area free of burnable material located in such a way that erosion is kept to a minimum.

Constructed firebreaks should tie into existing natural or man-made barriers whenever possible. These barriers include lakes, streams, ponds, roads, cultivated fields, pastures, and utility right-of-ways. No gaps should be left through which wildfire might enter the area to be protected.

Dead trees next to firebreaks should be cut and removed as these trees burn slowly and could throw sparks across the firebreak.

Vegetative Firebreaks

All firebreaks may be vegetated for added fire control, wildlife food, or livestock forage, but they must be widened to permit sufficient sunlight to reach the vegetation. A 30 foot width is required for these purposes.

Plant species selection will be based on attributes in retarding fire and ease of maintenance. These species should provide green cover during the spring and fall fire seasons.

Grazed firebreaks can be used in areas where livestock are present in sufficient numbers to keep the firebreak closely grazed. These firebreaks will utilize species suitable for livestock forage that are compatible with the firebreak purpose. Vegetation must be reduced to 6 inches or less in height prior to September 1.

Select plant species that provide wildlife food and cover if compatible with purpose.

Roads Used as Firebreaks

Existing roads may be used as firebreaks if properly maintained. They should be at least 10 feet wide if used for this purpose.

All flammable material must be removed from the roads in early spring and fall prior to the critical fire seasons.