

**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, debris and detritus.

**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 strips or blocks will be of sufficient width and length to meet the intended purposes.

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

Thin the overstory stand sufficiently to reduce the tree canopy and the potential of a crown fire.

Maintain vertical separation between fuel layers to remove "ladder" fuels, i.e., lowest layers of flammable vegetation do not connect to upper layers so that a fire cannot "step up" to higher canopies.

Treat or remove woody plant residues sufficiently and at a time to minimize fuel loadings to acceptable fire risk levels and reduce incidence of harmful insects and

disease.

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 understory fine fuels.

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.

Design and layout should include enhancement of multiple uses.

Consider beneficial and other effects of installation of the fuel break on cultural resources and 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.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or download it from the electronic [Field Office Technical Guide](#) for your state.

**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

or treat as necessary to maintain the desired level of fire spread risk.

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

Maintain the functionality of the original design throughout the life of the practice.