

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

FUEL BREAK

(Acre)

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.

Plan fuel breaks where they will minimize risk to the resources and structures being protected.

Thin the overstory vegetation sufficiently to reduce the potential of a crown fire.

Maintain vertical separation between fuel layers. Remove “ladder” fuels, i.e., lowest layers of

flammable vegetation connecting to upper layers, so that a fire cannot “step up” to higher canopies.

Treat or remove slash sufficiently to minimize fuel loadings and reduce incidence of harmful insects and disease. Refer to Florida NRCS conservation practice standard Woody Residue Treatment, Code 384, for additional information.

Manage grasses and forbs to minimize fine fuels. Establish fire-resistant vegetation to further decrease the risk of the spread of fire. Grass species such as *Andropogon*, *Panicum* and *Paspalum* assist with fire retardation, if properly managed.

Identify and manage noxious weeds (<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/botany/noxweed.html>) and FLEPPC Category I invasive plants (<http://www.fleppc.org/list/list.htm>).

Impact to cultural resources, wetlands and Federal and State protected species need to be avoided or minimized to the extent practical during planning, design and implementation of this conservation practice in accordance with established National and Florida NRCS policy; General Manual (GM) Title 420-Part 401, Title 450-Part 401, and Title 190-Parts 410.22 and 410.26; National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.6; National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook (NCRPH); and The National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH).

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Evaluate energy consumption when developing the conservation plan; plan and design practices in a manner that requires the least amount of energy to accomplish the desired outcomes.

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. Refer to Florida NRCS conservation practice standard [Prescribed Grazing, Code 528](#), for additional information.

Mowing and/or winter prescribed burning will be used to manage groundcover in the fuel break. Refer to Florida NRCS conservation practice standard Prescribed [Burning, Code 338](#), for additional information.

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, including pollinators.

Design and layout should include enhancement of multiple uses. Coordinate and time activities to optimize the stated purposes of conservation practices.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare specifications for applying this practice to each site and record them on approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

Specifications will include:

- site map or sketch of planning area;
- vegetation types within fuel break and planned maintenance practices, if applicable;
- length, width and type of block or strip established;
- forest slash treatment methods, if applicable; and
- estimated fuel load of forest stands if planning prescribed burning.

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance (O&M) plan shall be prepared and provided to the landowner to ensure that the practice functions as intended over time.

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.

Frequently inspect fuel breaks to assure that a low level risk of fire spread is maintained.

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

### REFERENCES

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Monroe, Martha C. and Susan Marynowski. 1999. *Developing Land in Florida with Fire in Mind: Recommendations for Designers, Developers, and Decision Makers.* Univ.Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/FR/FR05900.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2012)

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Yarlett, Lewis. 1996. *Common Grasses of Florida and the Southeast.* The Florida Native Plant Society, 167 pp.