

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**  
**FIREBREAK**

(Feet)

**CODE 394**

**DEFINITION**

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

**PURPOSES**

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

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on all land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Use of this standard will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and will consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination of these.

Firebreaks will be of sufficient width and length to contain the expected fire. The minimum width of a firebreak will be 15 feet or 3 times the height of the available fuel, whichever is greater.

Firebreaks will be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected. Erosion control measures will be installed to prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Seedbed preparation, dates, depths, fertility requirements, site adaptation and planting methods will be consistent with the requirements in the IN NRCS Seeding Tool and Indiana (IN) Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standard (327) Conservation Cover.

The firebreak seeding will be one or more of the following species. Select species from Table 1.

**Table 1 – Suitable Species**

<b>Cool Season Grass Species</b>
Kentucky Bluegrass
Orchardgrass
<b>Legume Species</b>
Alsike Clover
White Clover
Red Clover
Birdsfoot Trefoil

**Seeding rates** will be selected from the IN NRCS Seed Calculator using (327) Conservation Cover (erosive rate).

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Use existing barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, field borders, skid trails, landings, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-ways, cultivated land, or other areas as firebreaks.

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

**Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office, or download it from the Field Office Technical Guide for your State.**

Locate firebreaks on the contour where practicable to minimize risk of soil erosion.

Consider multiple uses when designing and laying out firebreaks. For example a firebreak may be used as a travel lane.

Treatments such as mowing and disking should be timed to reduce impacts to nesting wildlife so vegetative cover should not be disturbed during the primary nesting period of April 1 through August 1.

Exercise caution under power lines as heavy smoke may conduct electricity.

Consider using firebreaks to divide prescribed burning areas into manageable units of no more than 1/3 of the field.

Consider the beneficial and other effects of installation of the firebreak on cultural resources and threatened and endangered species, natural areas, riparian areas and wetlands.

When pollinator habitat is a purpose, a minimum of two (2) legume species will be selected that cover as much of the bloom period (early, mid and late) as feasible.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications will be prepared for the practice site. Plans will include the following:

- Species of plants to be established.
- Seeding rates.
- Seeding dates.
- Establishment procedure.
- Planned rates and timing of nutrient application.
- Other information pertinent to establishing and managing the species or species of plants to be established.
- If grazed, use a prescribed grazing plan according to NRCS IN FOTG Standard (528) Prescribed Grazing.

Plans and specifications for the establishment and management plant species to be established may be recorded in narrative form, on job sheets, or on other forms.

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mow, disk, or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds.

Inspect all firebreaks for woody materials such as dead limbs or blown down trees and remove them from the firebreak.

Inspect firebreaks at least annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of flammable vegetation.

Repair erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Access by vehicles or people will be controlled to prevent damage.

Bare ground firebreaks that are no longer needed will be stabilized with vegetation.

Any plant species, whose presence or overpopulation may jeopardize this practice, will be controlled. Spraying or other control methods will be performed on a "spot" basis to protect forbs/legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

An operation and maintenance plan will be provided to and reviewed with the landowner. The plan will include the following items and others as appropriate.

1. Fertility management to maintain a vigorous vegetative cover in protected area. Caution should be used with fertilization to maintain water quality.
2. Reestablish vegetative cover immediately where erosion has removed established seeding.
3. Periodically inspect area for any new maintenance items and take immediate action to protect from further damage or deterioration.

### REFERENCES

*Prescribed Burning Habitat Management Fact Sheet*, IDNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/files/HMFSPrescribedBurn.pdf>

*Missouri NRCS – Prescribed Burning Conservation Practice Information Sheet (IS-MO338)*, Missouri NRCS FOTG Section 4.