

**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 lands where protection from wildfire is needed.

CRITERIA

Use the following criteria in planning and applying this practice. The general criteria apply to all Fuel Breaks.

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Fuel break strips or blocks will be of sufficient width and length to meet the intended purpose(s).

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

Thin the overstory stand sufficiently to reduce tree crown-to-crown contact 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 all woody material sufficiently and at a time to minimize fuel loadings to acceptable fire risk levels and reduce incidence

of harmful insects and disease. Comply with Practice Standard 384 - Woody Residue Treatment.

Break the continuity of fine fuels by managing the amount and location of brush, grasses and forbs.

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. Refer to Practice Standard 528 – Prescribed Grazing.

Woody residue 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.

Establish fire-resistant vegetation to further decrease the risk of the spread of fire.

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.

Minimum documentation will include:

- map showing location of fuel breaks; additionally the map should delineate:
 - resources or structures protected;
 - streams and water bodies;
 - additional sensitive areas such as critical areas or cultural resources that need to be considered during slash reduction activities
- method(s) of construction and equipment to be used; and, expected timetable of construction activities.
- forest management plan (including fuel break details) prepared by a registered forester when available.
- statement requiring compliance with all federal, state and local laws.
- required operation and maintenance instructions.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (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 frequently 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.