Firebreak Fact Sheet

Applies to conservation practices Firebreak (394) and Prescribed Burning (338).

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service - North Dakota **November 2017**

Mowed, burned, and extinguished firebreak, prior to a prescribed burn.

What is a firebreak: A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire.

How it helps: When properly designed, installed and maintained, they may stop the spread of low intensity wild fires. More often they provide an entry point and anchor point where wildfire fighting activities can effectively be initiated. Firebreaks are only one part of a wildfire protection system. By themselves, firebreaks should never be relied upon as the sole protection of an area. Firebreaks are an integral part of a complete system to minimize the potential impact of catastrophic wildfire.

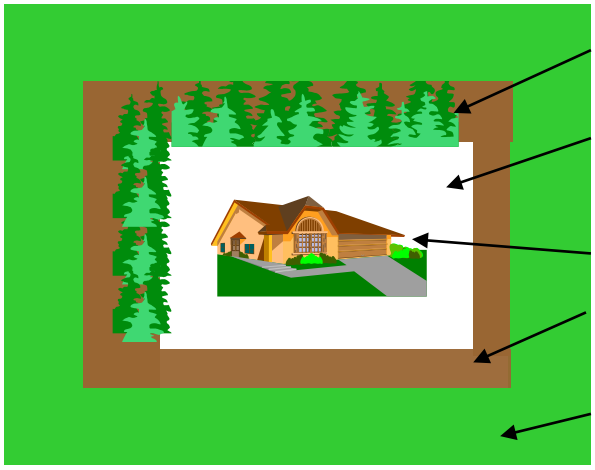
Firebreaks may be permanent or temporary. Permanent firebreaks are usually part of a system protecting building sites and other high value properties. Temporary firebreaks often are used to protect fields and as part of a prescribed burning plan.

To apply this practice: The most effective fire prevention is accomplished through a targeted approach. Most benefits accrue from efforts applied to the areas closest to the areas needing protected. Key items to address include:

- Buildings are covered with non-combustible or fire-resistant materials.
- Defensible space exists around and within areas to be protected. (Defensible space should be at least 35 feet wide around high value property such as homes and should ideally consist of non-combustible ground cover such as soil, gravel, irrigated lawn etc.)

- Firebreaks should be properly sited, contiguous, and well maintained.
- Combustible debris, (leaves, paper, etc.) is not allowed to accumulate.
- Combustible materials such as firewood, LP tanks, etc are located away from, and downwind from structures.
- Easy access is provided for firefighters and equipment.
- Management plans exist for extreme fire conditions.

Maintaining Firebreaks (Wildfire protection systems)



Windbreak with no debris, litter, downed limbs, or leaf buildup.

Defensible Space - A safety zone cleared of combustible materials for at least 35 feet immediately adjacent to property needing fire protection.

Fire-resistant building.

Non-vegetated, gravel, or bare soil firebreak.

Short, irrigated, grazed, and/or mowed vegetated firebreak to reduce fire intensity and provide access to firefighters.

Key components of combination firebreak

As fire danger increases during certain times of the year (usually early spring before green up and from late summer to first fall rains) land owners should stay aware of rapidly changing conditions and adapt management strategies accordingly.

In short, wildfire protection is maintaining property that is hard to ignite, maintaining firebreaks between property and potential wildfire sources, managing wildfire sources outside the firebreaks to reduce fire ignition and intensity risks, and keeping a watchful eye during extreme fire conditions.

Where to get help:

Designing an effective wildland fire control system can be very complex. Professional assistance from your local fire department, the North Dakota Forest Service, or the US Forest Service is encouraged. Your local NRCS office can provide design assistance for the firebreak component. The following resources provide more details and considerations for designing an effective firebreak.

http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/ND/nd-cpa-394_firebreak_data.XLS
http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/ND/394_Standard.pdf
http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/ND/394_Documentation_Requirements.pdf
http://www.firewise.org

Daily fire danger ratings for North Dakota can be found at:
http://www.crh.noaa.gov/bis/fire.htm