

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

FIREBREAK

(Ft.)

CODE 394

DEFINITION

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

PURPOSE

- 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

All planned work shall comply with applicable Federal, state, and local laws, regulations or permits.

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

Firebreak width and length will be sufficient to contain the expected fire.

Locate firebreaks to minimize risk to the resources being protected.

Install erosion control measures as needed to prevent sediment from leaving the site.

For vegetated firebreaks, select noninvasive plant species capable of retarding fire.

CONSIDERATIONS

Use 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 existing firebreaks. Electric line right-of-ways can be hazardous during fires, since heavy smoke may conduct electricity from overhead lines to the ground.

When choosing barriers or locating firebreaks, consider the effects human use of the firebreak or barrier may have on wildlife and fisheries resources.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms.

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

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

When vegetating firebreaks, consider using diverse species combinations which best meet the needs of native wildlife and pollinators.

Design and install firebreaks to permit multiple uses and resource benefits whenever possible.

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

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare specifications for each firebreak shall provide the information necessary to

implement and maintain the firebreak. As a minimum, this shall include the following:

- An aerial photograph showing the location and orientation of the firebreak in relation to surrounding ground covers or land uses.
- A topographic map of the firebreak site.
- A weather map showing predominant wind patterns for the site or area, if available.
- Detail drawings of the firebreak and any associated erosion control practices.
- Specifications for the construction and stabilization of the firebreak, including but not limited to: cut and fill calculations, stabilization specifications, and seeding specifications. Record specifications using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan and burn plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Provide an operation and maintenance plan specific to the site and purpose of the firebreak, which as a minimum, details guidance to:

- Inspect firebreaks at least annually. Remove flammable vegetation or woody materials, such as dead limbs or downed trees, from firebreaks.
- Repair or maintain any erosion control measures associated with the firebreaks as necessary, to ensure their proper function.
- Control access to firebreaks to prevent damage to soils and vegetation.

In addition, include the following operation and maintenance guidance, as appropriate for the firebreak:

- Mow disk, or graze vegetated firebreaks to avoid a build-up of

excess plant litter and to control unwanted vegetation. Schedule and implement maintenance activities to minimize negative impacts on soil condition, desirable vegetation, water quality, and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

- Rework bare-ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of vegetation. Schedule and implement maintenance activities to minimize negative impacts on soil condition, desirable vegetation, water quality, and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.
- Stabilize any bare-ground firebreaks that are no longer needed with materials or vegetation appropriate for local and site-specific conditions.

REFERENCES

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry.
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildlandfire/prescribedfire/index.htm>

Pennsylvania Prescribed Fire Council.
<http://www.paprescribedfire.org/index.php>

National Wildfire Coordinating Group. Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide, July 2008, 50 pp.
<http://training.nwccg.gov/>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. General Manual 190, Part 413 – Prescribed Burning, Amendment 15, September 2009.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Pennsylvania State Supplement to the General Manual 190, Part 413 – Prescribed Burning.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. National Range and Pasture Handbook, Appendix A. NRCS Policy on Prescribed Burning on Grazing Lands, September 1997.