

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE GENERAL SPECIFICATION
FIREBREAK
(Feet) CODE 394**

DEFINITION

A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire.

PURPOSES

- To prevent the spread of wildfire.
- To control prescribed burns.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

All land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and shall 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 fire. The minimum width will be 10 times the height of the vegetation (fine fuel) being burned for all purposes and types. The width of the firebreak includes the natural, burned, and constructed portions. Each of these can be used in combination.

Firebreaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected.

Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks will be noninvasive; possessing attributes making them capable of retarding fire, and easy to maintain.

Erosion control measures shall prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Comply with applicable laws and regulations, including the Texas Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Silviculture.

TYPES OF FIREBREAKS

1. **Natural firebreaks**

Existing terrain features can serve as firebreaks. Small roads, trails and similar features may be used for installing low-intensity backfires. Other terrain such as cropland fields, rivers, roads or other areas devoid of fuels can serve as firebreaks for headfires. Widths will be sufficient to contain the fire.

2. Constructed firebreaks

Plowed, disked and bladed firebreaks will be wide enough to control the fire. Vegetation will be removed or covered with soil to achieve an effective barrier for ground fires. Constructed firebreaks will be planned, located, and installed to minimize erosion. Needed water control devices will be installed to accomplish this end.

3. Green firebreaks

Any firebreak may be vegetated for added fire control and wildlife food, but if they are in a forest, they must be widened to permit sufficient sunlight to reach the vegetation. Plant species selection will be based on fire retarding attributes and maintenance needs.

4. Burned firebreaks

Removal of vegetation by fire to create a firebreak will be according to a *Burn Plan* and the *Prescribed Burning Standard*. The burn will be between two parallel lines that may be constructed, natural (such as a road), wet lines, or any combination. The width between the lines will be at least 20 feet, and the lines will be of a sufficient width and condition to control the burn.

5. Roads

Existing roads can be effective firebreaks if properly maintained. Planned roads will be planned to best serve the needs for access and fire control. Adequate measures such as water control devices will be installed to prevent excessive erosion or loss of the usefulness of the road. Roads must be planned, installed and maintained to permit the traffic of needed fire-fighting equipment.

CONSIDERATIONS

Constructed firebreaks should tie into existing natural and cultural barriers. These include streams, lakes, ponds, public roads, drainage canals, railroads and utility rights-of-way.

The type of constructed firebreak will adapt to the local needs and conditions. The types include woods roads, plowed or disked firebreaks, burned firebreaks, green firebreaks and bladed firebreaks.

Roads, green firebreaks and plowed or disked firebreaks may be used in any area and on nearly all terrains, provided location specifications are followed.

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

Firebreaks in forestland will be kept out of streamside management zones (SMZ's) or riparian forest buffers (code 391). In the absence of SMZ's or riparian buffers, the firebreak should be located at least 35 feet from Order 1 and 2 watercourses and 66 feet from streams of Order 3 or greater.

Locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms as much as possible. If winds are predictable, firebreaks should be located perpendicular to the wind and on the upwind side of the area to be protected.

Firebreak construction should not interfere with natural runoff (such as in the flatwoods). On lands with slopes greater than 3%, care must be taken not to concentrate runoff waters with the firebreak.

Pasture firebreaks should be planned as part of the total grazing program.

After correct width and configuration is planned, use plant species that are locally adapted.

Consider multiple uses in the design and layout.

Consider cultural resources when planning this practice. This practice may adversely affect cultural resources and should comply with GM 420, Part 401, during planning, prior to installation and during maintenance.

Consider threatened and endangered species when planning this practice and document any effect in the environmental evaluation.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, and technical notes, narrative statements in the conservation plan and the burn plan, or other acceptable documentation. See Texas specification for Prescribed Burning, code 338.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

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

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

Inspect firebreaks annually. Rework bare ground firebreaks and re-burn burned firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of flammable vegetation.

Repair erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Clean and repair all surface drains in firebreaks.

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

Bare ground firebreaks which are no longer needed will be stabilized.

APPROVAL AND CERTIFICATION

Firebreak

(Ft.) CODE 394

PRACTICE SPECIFICATIONS APPROVED:

/s/ Jeff Goodwin _____

10/1/2015

State Rangeland Management Specialist

Date

/s/ Kristy Oates _____

10/1/2015

State Resource Conservationist

Date

Reviewed By:

Zone Rangeland Management Specialists

State Office Specialists