

## Firebreak

# WV Conservation Practice Job Sheet

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.

#### **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 expected fire.

All firebreaks will begin and end at control points, such as a road or stream, that will not allow fire to burn around the end of the firebreak.

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

Erosion control measures shall be installed to prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks will be noninvasive and capable of retarding fire.

***Comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, during the installation operation and maintenance of this practice.***

#### **Firebreaks Used to Contain Prescribed Burns**

West Virginia Code 20-3-5 states that “No burning allowed by this section may be done unless all inflammable material has been removed from around the material to be burned as a safety strip for a distance which insures that the fire will not escape and which is no less ten feet.”

Note: West Virginia NRCS does not have a Prescribed Burning conservation practice standard. Those interested in prescribed burning must contact the West Virginia Division of Forestry for assistance when planning and/or applying a prescribed burn.

#### **Permanent Woodland Firebreaks**

Keep grades below 15 percent wherever possible and build with a width of at least 8 feet. Note: wider firebreaks will be needed if vehicle access is necessary and/or the terrain is steep.

Provide water control and water quality safeguards and vegetate the firebreak .

Note: Existing woodland roads or trails can be effective firebreaks if properly maintained. Abandoned roads or

trails should be renovated and erosion controlled. Fallen trees, leaves or other inflammable materials must be removed from the road surface. If roads are overgrown, they must be cleared of woody vegetation and mowed. Mowing just prior to the fall fire season will improve the road's effectiveness as a firebreak.

### **Permanent Firebreaks in Open Land or Plantations**

Locate firebreaks at intervals throughout plantations. Frequency of firebreaks throughout the plantation will depend upon the value of the crop, degree of hazard, and size, shape and orientation / location of the plantation.

### **Permanent Sod Firebreaks**

Seed to appropriate cool season grass/legume mix on prepared seedbed that is at least 8 feet wide. See conservation practice standard Critical Area Planting, code 342.

Maintain a thick, short stand by mowing at least annually.

Woody vegetation will be controlled through cutting, mowing or the use of approved herbicides.

### **Permanent Plowed, Disked or Bladed Firebreaks**

These may be used parallel to public roads, railroads and other high risk areas such as, forestland, farm fields, native grass plantings, cutover land, old fields and property boundaries.

On lands with slopes greater than 5 percent locate firebreaks approximately on the contour.

Disk or plow strips at least 8 feet wide.

After initial establishment by plowing or disking, disk annually before fall statutory fire season (October 1- December 31) to control vegetation and remove all inflammable material from the firebreak.

### **Temporary Firebreaks**

Temporary firebreaks are to be built during wildfire control efforts. Location, pattern, and frequency need to be determined on site taking into consideration present and anticipated fire conditions. West Virginia Division of Forestry personnel are responsible for directing wildfire control efforts in West Virginia.

Minimum specifications include clearing a lane at least 6 feet wide with a 2 foot wide pathway in the middle cleared of all flammable material down to mineral soil.



Firebreaks should angle outward from the top of the hill to the bottom and be placed on the outside of the drainage ways (where applicable) to keep burning debris from rolling across the cleared line into unburned areas.

Placement should also take into consideration potential snags which may fall across the firebreak.

Erodible areas should be vegetated following the fire emergency.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms.

Consider the selection of plant species that will enhance the needs of wildlife/pollinators in the area. Orchardgrass and clovers are fire resistant, provide wildlife benefits and are suitable for maintaining cover on field firebreaks where erosion control is necessary. **Tall fescue is also suitable for maintaining cover where erosion control is needed, however, it should be noted that it does not provide wildlife benefits and that adjacent landuses and vegetation can be impacted and should be considered when using this species.**

Wildlife values can be improved by clearing strips 20 to 30 feet wide on both sides of the firebreak. Refer to conservation practice standard, Field Border, code 386.

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

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.

This Job Sheet developed by [Barbara McWhorter, NRCS Forester](#)  
West Virginia Registered Professional Forester #335

## Firebreak – WV Job Sheet

### SPECIFICATIONS

Site-specific requirements are listed on the following job sheet. Specifications are prepared in accordance with the WV NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. Information in this job sheet is considered to be part of the conservation plan.

<b>Client:</b>	<b>Farm #:</b>
<b>Field(s):</b>	<b>Tract #:</b>
<b>Designed By:</b>	<b>Location:</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Total Feet:</b>

**Purpose of Firebreak:**

Field #	Length (ft)	Minimum Width (ft)	Type (Temporary or Permanent)	Placement (Woodland or Open Land)	Construction Method (Hand or Mechanical)	Equipment Used	Construction Date	Seeding * (Yes or No)

\* If applicable, see Critical Area Planting, code 342.

**Additional Specifications and Notes:**

**Operation and Maintenance**

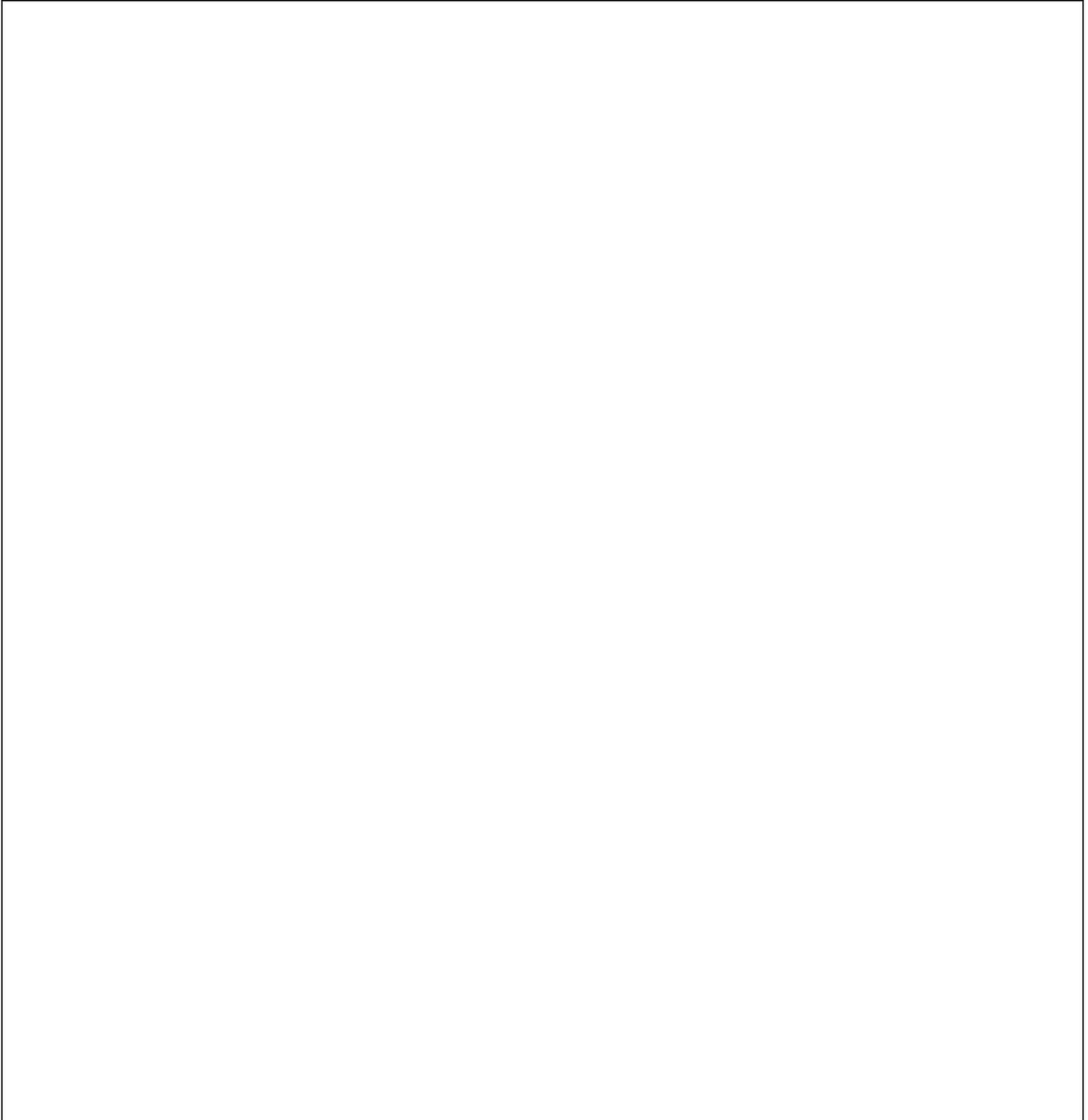
Mow, disk, or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds. Treatment should be timed to reduce impacts to nesting when possible. Where practical, management activities will be performed outside the primary nesting season (March 15 - July 15). Inspect all firebreaks annually prior to March 1 and each fall after most of the leaves have fallen for woody materials such as dead leaves and limbs or blown down trees and remove them from the firebreak. 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 should be controlled to prevent damage. Bare ground firebreaks, which are no longer needed, should be stabilized.

**Additional requirements:**

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If needed, an aerial view or a side view of the practice can be shown below. Other relevant information, complementary practices and measures, and additional specifications may be included.



**Questions regarding the planning, application or maintenance of the Firebreak should be directed to:**

\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_

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