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

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.

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.

Evaluate the site's potential for invasion by undesirable plants during practice planning and design. Monitor disturbed and adjacent areas to enable early detection and control of invasive plants.

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

This practice is not applicable where its use could reduce the quality of existing sage-grouse (SG) habitat.

Utilize the following table to determine practice restrictions based on SG lek proximity.

Practice distance from SG lek Core vs Non-Core Population Areas		Practice Restrictions
<0.6 mi.	< 0.25 mi	Initiate High Priority joint planning (NRCS/WGF MOU) through the Regional Wildlife Coordinator. WGF recommendations must be followed to ensure compliance with the Governor's Executive Order.
>0.6 mi.	0.25 – 2.0 mi.	Practice activities will not be conducted from March 15 to June 30 to avoid disturbance to breeding and nesting SG.*
	>2.0 mi.	No SG restrictions

*Activities conducted in unsuitable habitat (as defined by the Governor's Executive Order 2010-4) or that are clearly beneficial to SG may be subject to less restrictions consistent with WGF case by case recommendations.

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 lines can be hazardous in heavy smoke as they may conduct electricity.

When using barriers consider the effects on wildlife and fisheries.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms.

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

Consider the selection of plant species that will enhance the needs of wildlife in the area.

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

Design and layout should include multiple uses.

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.

Other preventive practices should be considered and recommended in high use and residential areas. e.g. Building materials, emergency plans, road design and layout, identifying water sources.

Employ whole tree skidding to increase effectiveness and efficiency with slash management.

Firebreak creation should be in conjunction with harvesting activities in order to reduce construction needs and costs.

Long term consideration may be give to a regeneration plan where possible, without compromising the effectiveness of the firebreak. Prune to reduce ladder fuels and utilize appropriately sized breaks and spacing between desired understory (shrubs and regeneration) and overstory, while rotating into new cutting strips for firebreaks as regeneration matures.

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.

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.

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

Inspect firebreaks at least annually and 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 will be controlled to prevent damage.

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

REFERENCES

Memorandum of Understanding between the USDA, NRCS and the State of Wyoming, Wyoming Game and Fish Commission. August 11, 2010.

State of Wyoming, Governor's Executive Order 2010-4 and Attachments. Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area Protection. August 18, 2010.