

Protection of Rangeland and Pastures From Wildfire

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Grazinglands are subject to wildfire because of an abundance of fine fuel (grass), frequent dry conditions, and proximity to an ignition source - usually a road or highway. Due to the risk of wildfire, rangelands and pastures must be protected from accidental fires and/or those that are intentionally set. On-site preparations to protect grazinglands from fire include arrangements for removal of livestock and protection for feeders, pens, highlines, fences, oil and gas structures, wells, windmills, stored hay, barns, houses and cabins.

Firebreaks are a necessary and useful tool in this regard. By their very name, "firebreaks" or "fire guards", are designed to keep fire in or out of a pasture; and, most people assume that fire control is their only purpose. They will stop most fires, protect the pasture, and reduce losses, however, they do offer other benefits. Firebreaks can also be used for access by equipment to a prescribed fire; furnish access to inaccessible parts of the property; provide additional forage for livestock and/or wildlife; allow access for logging operations; allow for easier "working" of livestock; and offer recreational benefits such as hiking, horseback riding or bike trails. So, firebreaks should be constructed to meet the needs of the individual landowner and any additional benefits to be met while offering fire protection to rangelands and pastures.

There is a variety of firebreaks and methodologies, so the best practice to use will be determined by characteristics unique to the specific ranch under consideration. Often a combination of methods is most appropriate because of variability in vegetation type, topography and soil. Mowing as the **only** firebreak preparation is discouraged because of safety concerns.

PERMANENT FIREBREAKS

Cleared firebreaks are bare soil lines prepared by mechanical methods that, while they do need to be maintained, tend to be long-lived. These firebreaks must extend to bare ground or mineral soil, with no bridge of continuous dead fuel, so fire cannot creep across the fireline into or outside the pasture. Cleared firebreaks can create erosion problems so care should be

