



connections

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Greenways and Trails Program

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What's Your Sign? Trail Marking and Signage

“Signs are probably the quickest and easiest way to leave the trail user with a positive impression. If the signs are high quality, well maintained, and properly located, other trail problems are often over-looked. Consistent signs are the quickest way to increase the trail’s identity and the public’s support for the trail.” (National Park Service)

Trail system signs and markers are not just about helping people find their way in the woods. Trail signage helps to create an identity for your system, set expectations, educate the users, draw people to new places and experiences, and promote safety. Signs and markers, and even in some cases the lack of signs, can be a critical component to creating the desired trail experience.

Types of Signs and Markers

Trail signage can be divided into the following general categories:

- Trailhead Signs
- Intersection Directional Signs
- Reassurance Markers
- Interpretive Waysides
- Safety Signs

Trailhead signs can come in a variety of shapes, sizes and styles, from professionally designed “kiosks” to simple painted wood signs. But the trailhead is where the user makes her first and most important decisions – What experience should I expect from this trail? What can I accomplish with the time I have? Is this trail at the right level of difficulty for me? Is my preferred mode of travel allowed? – as a result, trailhead signs are vital for both welcoming users to the trail and setting appropriate expectations. Even the character of the sign sets the tone for the entire trail



experience. For example, a professionally designed sign, will lead the user to expect a professionally designed trail system. A simple, rustic sign, may set the expectation for a more rustic trail experience.

A trailhead sign will probably include the trail name, property manager logo, information on destinations and distances, allowed uses and any restrictions or regulations. It may also include some description of the trail or property, a map, trail difficulty or accessibility information, and user etiquette.



Intersection directional signs are perhaps the most important type of sign for user safety, reassurance, wayfinding, and, ultimately, for creating a positive user experience. Trail systems with intersections, especially those with multiple intersections, can be confusing, even to regular users, and even to those with a map. Directional signs at intersections not only keep the user on the right path, but also allow her to alter her plans along the way. Perhaps an intersection sign will draw her to a new destination, such as a waterfall or summit; maybe she will try to take a new loop trail back; or perhaps she will be encouraged to turn around before it gets dark because the going is slower than anticipated.

Intersection signs should include information on key destinations and distances with a particular attention to main features, trailheads and parking areas.



Tips and Tools (Mattock and McLeod)

Closing and Reclaiming Damaged Trails webpage by IMBA is at http://www.imba.com/resources/trail_building/reclaiming_trail.html

Naturalizing Abandoned Trail from the FHWA Trail Maintenance and Construction Notebook is at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/fspubs/00232839/page12.htm>

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources “Trail Planning, Design and Development Guidelines” (http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/trails_waterways/index.html) includes a section of decommissioning and restoring unsustainable trails.

On the Path Ahead

Northeast Trail Symposium, June 10-12, 2010 in Great Barrington, at the Berkshire South Regional Community Center.

Trail Builders! Don't miss this amazing learning event for volunteers and professionals. This 3 day symposium features Trail Building experts versed in making projects happen. Workshops will address planning for a wide variety of trail projects and skills training for fieldwork. Visit our web page at www.bnrc.net/TrailSymposium.htm for the complete 3 day schedule and registration information. You may register for 1 to 3 days. Learn how to plan a project, build a bridge, construct accessible trails or put in stone cribbing. There will be plenty of doing, seeing, and listening - for all skill levels - led by locally, regionally, and nationally known experts in the trails field.

Funding support available: let us help you attend this event! We encourage trail volunteers and nonprofit organizations with trail building projects in the Housatonic Heritage area to submit scholarship applications to offset the cost of attending the Trail Symposium. Scholarships are awarded on a first come first save basis, please don't wait to apply for this funding support. For more information on this event go to www.bnrc.net/TrailSymposium.htm or email us at wnetrailbuildersinfo@gmail.com.

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Please forward to others who might be interested in Massachusetts Greenways and Trails.



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