

Signage in the forest serves two primary purposes – to inform and direct trail users. Wayfinding signage and markers guide the user through the town forest on their chosen trail route. Interpretive and informational signage can educate visitors about the natural and cultural resources of the town forest. It can also be used to relay details about parcel management, site maps, and policies.

Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signage is imperative for forest users to navigate the forest and is especially useful for new visitors to the forest. It enhances the visitor experience and can encourage trail users to explore new trails in the town forest and help distribute people away from the crowded trails. Throughout the forest, the signage should have a unified design that conveys a sense of place and town ownership/management. Wayfinding signage should be placed at all trail junctions.

A sign can be placed on a post in the center of the junction with directional arrows or on trees at each trail leading from the junction. In areas with high potential for vandalism, consider placing the signs on trees. At the main intersections or decision points, a trail map with a “You are Here” arrow can be placed on a signpost.

In addition to trail signage, consider adding information that indicates the type or difficulty level of the trail. For example, mountain biking trails often indicate the level of difficulty of the trail using a green circle, blue square, black diamond. For trails with restricted uses (i.e., hiking only, no horses), signage should be placed at the beginning of that trail, indicating any restricted use. Think, a sign with the unallowed use crossed out.

A directional trail sign should include no more than four trails/destinations. Beyond pointing towards trails, the sign could point towards the trailhead and/or towards forest destinations such as waterfalls or viewpoints. Distances to those destinations and trailheads could also be included, rounded to the tenth of a mile. The trails should be listed in the following order: the trail that is straight ahead, the trail that is to the left, and the trail that is to the right. For complex trail systems with many intersections, the forest managers should consider numbering the intersections.

Trail Signage

Wood is frequently used for trail signs as it is a natural material, aesthetically pleasing, and readily available. The type of wood to use is weather dependent – locust and oak are the most durable, although somewhat challenging to work with, while cedar is relatively durable but easier to work with. Proper sealing, such as with linseed oil can also enhance durability. The wood should be

straight-grained, dry, knot-free, and at least two inches thick. Plastics, fiberglass, and composites are weather-resistant, relatively inexpensive, and a good choice for smaller signs and signposts.

Technical Specifications

- The sign face itself should be clear, concise, simple, legible, and well-spaced, with ample room at the margin.
- The posts should be 4"x4", preferably cedar, and at least 5' tall. The post should be buried 2' deep and the top of the wayfinding sign and post should be at 36".
- If signs need to be attached to trees, do not nail or screw the signs flush to the tree but leave some room for growth (at least an inch).
- Using a star-bit screw to attach signage can reduce theft/vandalism.
- Signage put on trees will require more maintenance than signs on posts. We encourage signs to be placed on posts when possible.

Trail Markers

Trail markers help users follow and stay on trails. Markers are especially crucial for trails with significant winter use, as the trail footprint can be obscured by snow. Painted blazes on trees are the best practice, as they do less damage to trees than plastic markers, are easy to alter, and are visible in the winter, unlike painted rocks or cairns. Blazes should be painted on trees slightly above eye level in each direction, and slightly higher for equestrian or cross-country ski trails. Blazes should not necessarily be painted on opposite sides of the same tree, as what is easily visible in one direction may not be in the other. Blazes should be placed on trees within sight distance of each other, such that while standing at one blaze, the trail user can see the next one. Double blazes should be painted where the trail turns, or the continuation of the trail may not be obvious.

Technical Specifications

- Markers are typically 2"x 6" painted vertical rectangles, although squares and circles are also acceptable. On trees with rough bark, the blaze may need to be smoothed with a paint scraper, wire brush, or draw knife. In general, we recommend that birch trees not be used, and precaution should be taken to not removed the bark.
- High quality, glossy exterior acrylic paint is best for long-term durability.

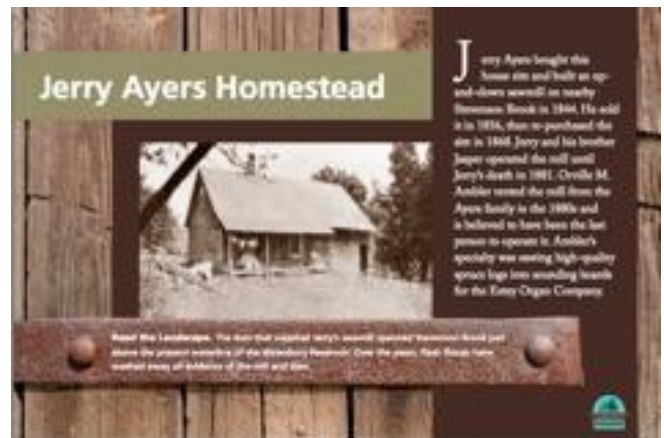
- Choose the color wisely. Do not use green for any trail, and white should be avoided for cross-country skiing and other winter trails.
- Vegetation should be pruned in front of the blazes to ensure the blaze is visible in all seasons.

Interpretive Signage

Interpretive signage communicates the cultural and natural resources of the site to the visitor. Successful interpretive signs attract the visitor to read them and teach them something they'll remember. The sign must capture the attention right off the bat, connect the site to the visitor's everyday life, provide an interesting and unique description, and tie the site into the history of the whole forest.

Each sign posted in the forest should be thoroughly researched but need not explain everything. The sign should leave something for the visitor to discover. The signage should be exclusively about that very spot – not what is nearby. The signs should open with a hook to capture the visitor's attention. This might be an interesting graphic, title, or overall sign appearance.

Design, development, and production of interpretative signs can be done in one of several ways. For smaller projects, local school students or youth groups can help prepare the signs – researching, writing, and even constructing the signs. For larger projects, the town forest committee may explore grant funding to hire a designer and fabricator.



An interpretive sign at Little River State Park, designed and produced by Maja Smith and Alexandra Murphy.

Technical Specifications

- The text should be written according to the 3-30-3 rule. There are three seconds to hook the visitor, 30 seconds if they are hooked, and three minutes if they are very interested.
- In general, there should be around 150 words of text on the sign, with no more than 250.
- The sign should be roughly 1/3 graphics, 1/3 text, and 1/3 blank space. Many visitors will only look at the graphics, so the image captions must be descriptive and convey the key information of the sign.

- Mounting Height: 24-30" with 30-45° angle towards the viewer. The front lower edge should be at 32".
- Text Size:
 - Title: 60-72 pt
 - Subtitles: 40-48 pt
 - Body Text: 24 pt
 - Captions: 18 pt

Resources

International Mountain Biking Association Trail Difficulty Rating System. Available online at <https://www.imba.com/resource/trail-difficulty-rating-system>