

Promote a Blue Trail



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CREATE BLUE TRAIL SIGNS

Signs inform users about a blue trail and create a safer and more environmentally sensitive experience. They raise awareness of and support for a blue trail and attract more users by providing exposure to the resource. Sign needs will vary depending on the size, type, and goal of your blue trail. Signs can be an expensive venture so it's good to develop a plan. In some cases signs may not be the best way to educate users. Maps, interpretative guides, or websites may be more appropriate in some cases. For more information see [Promote a Blue Trail: Create a Map and Interpretative Guide](#).

Check with your state agency in charge of signs on permitting and regulations. They may also have materials and resources available to you.

Design and construction

Surprisingly, the design and installation of signs can be controversial. Selecting the proper amount, size, color, style, location, and material are important in balancing the need to be visible with the desire to minimize visual intrusion. Other practical factors are cost and availability, weather resistance, installation, and susceptibility to vandalism and theft. Consider the following issues when developing a plan for signs along your blue trail.

Amount: Decide what information requires a sign and what does not. If you want a site to stand out so it can gain recognition, it is probably appropriate to put a sign there. If land ownership varies and trespassing is a concern, consistent signage of blue trail campsites or day-use sites may be appropriate. On the other hand, users may be familiar with the trail or carrying maps and guides, so it may be unnecessary to have a sign at every site.

Carefully consider the amount of information you include in a sign.

Size and color: The size and color of a sign depends on its purpose. A sign that users will need to see from a distance such as a hazard warning should be large and have contrasting colors. A sign indicating the name of a campsite and reminding users to pack out their garbage can be less visually obtrusive.

Standardization is important. Selecting a system that is easily understood and one that has been used successfully elsewhere is recommended. Consistency of color use can help establish the blue trail's identity. For example, the Hudson River Water Trail uses a green-blue-green color scheme that is similar to the group's logo, the Hudson River Valley Greenway. This color scheme is used on all site identifying signs, which include highly visible flags and painted 4 x 4 posts. Alternatively, others may use colors that better blend in with their natural environment.

Placement: Acquire any necessary permits or permission for placing your signs. Care should be taken to avoid sensitive habitat such as wetlands and areas with rare plants. In forested areas, signs are often placed on tree trunks to make them less obtrusive. In areas with fewer trees, signs can be lower to the ground. States such as Florida have guidelines on the permitting and installation of signs and do not allow signs to be posted on trees.

Materials: Issues to consider besides environmental sensitivity are cost, durability, vandalism or theft, and ability to mount signs in ice and snow, swamp, forest, and other conditions. When possible, use materials that are appropriate to the local environment.

Consider using recycled materials or locally and sustainably produced materials in your signs.

The longer a sign will last, the more expensive it will likely be. Materials to consider include:

- Wood signs may be more environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing but may require more frequent replacement and maintenance than other types of signs. Marine plywood and cedar hold up well in wet conditions. If you use wood, try to purchase materials that are sustainably harvested. Avoid pressure treated wood preserved with chromated copper arsenate because of the potential for leaching harmful chemicals into the surroundings, a problem in wet environments.
- Rock cairns in desert or beach areas can be effective site makers.
- Metal signs are more likely to be used to identify a permanent launch site. Aluminum is durable, but it is also expensive and in some areas prone to be stolen or subject to target practice. Steel is durable but more susceptible to rusting in a marine environment.
- Fiberglass can be used for durable, inexpensive signs that might require a high level of detail, such as interpretative signs or maps.

Maintainability: Before building signs, it is important to determine who is responsible for maintenance – an organization, landowner, state or county entity. If vandalism is a problem in your area, consider using materials that are inexpensive to replace or repair. Using positive wording on signs can help reduce vandalism. As you develop your plan, prioritize signs that are most critical to maintain. Prioritization for maintenance usually goes in the following order:

- Signs required for user safety
- Restrictions and advisory signs
- Destination and identification signs
- Interpretative signs



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Maintain a master list of all signs you install including information on type of sign, materials, conditions, and maintenance dates.

Types of signs

Road signs can guide users to the launch sites but in many cases it may be more helpful to have a map, interpretative guide, or website that users can use to find these areas. It can be expensive to install and maintain road signs. Unless your highway department considers the blue trail signs a priority, this burden will likely fall on the blue trail entity.

Trailhead signs (kiosks, display and bulletin boards) are a good place to post information because it's one place along the trail that users will likely spend a good deal of time as they gear up for their adventure and wait for shuttle drivers. Consider displaying the following information on these signs:

- **Safety:** Give warning to any hazards including dangerous currents, water levels, dams, mandatory portages, and boat traffic. For more information see [Resources: Safety](#).
- **Leave No Trace:** Include site specific information when possible regarding what to do with human waste and trash. For more

information see [Build a Blue Trail: Develop Trail Facilities](#).

- **Parking:** For those expecting to be on the trail overnight it helps to include information on where they can safely park.
- **Interpretation:** Describe the natural, cultural, and historical uniqueness of the area.
- **Amenities:** Provide information on lodging, outfitters, local business, and nearby trail networks. Such signs can be a great way to elicit support from local businesses, your chamber of commerce, and other partners.

Campsites and day-use sites signs can be marked where appropriate. For instance, the Susquehanna River Trail Association identifies camping islands by placing a wood duck box at the head of the island and a Leave No Trace sign at the site itself. Some trails depend on identification in interpretative guides and use no signs at the sites. Often a simple campground sign or day-use sign will help guide users without disrupting the scenery.

Signs along the trail to mark the route are generally not necessary from the water. Exceptions might be signs directing boaters to the correct channel around an island, particularly if there is a nearby hazard.

Positive sign approach

Using positive wording typically elicits a better response from users. The paragraph below exemplifies "positive" wording. It states the conditions and "rules" as non-threatening guidelines. Rather than saying "No Camping," the guideline instead says there is camping "by written permission only." The last point tells you where you can get more information.

Nomans Island: This is a wild island. There is no potable drinking water nor are there any facilities. Please help us maintain its magnificent beauty by following these

guidelines. Carry out all waste and rubbish;
Leave all pets on your boat; Keep fires small
and build them only below the high tide mark.
A state fire permit is required for all open fires;
Please respect the privacy of others; Camping
at the eastern and western ends of the island
by written permission only. For further
information, call or write: The Long Island Trail
Association, P.O. Box D, Long Beach, NY 09876,
Tel. (123) 465-7890.

Less is best

The most effective signage embraces an elementary principle: less is best. It pays to keep in mind that persons in the wild may consider signs a blot on the landscape or an indication that some “authority” is watching or looking out for them. Usually, a few signs are more effective than many, and should be designed to do their job effectively but unobtrusively.