Signing Parks & Trails: Techniques that inform the visitor experience

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1) Title: Introduction

We design sign standards for parks, trails and preserves.
10 years ago, sustainable solutions
Share lessons I learned on how to sign a park.

Our customers seem to emphasize trails, camping and passive recreation

- I'll share our design process
- Plan for what a visitor needs to know,
- Describe the value of standards/consistency

With time for questions.

I hope this will be helpful.

How many of you have a working system for signing parks?
How many think the signing in their parks could be improved?

2

2) Related Experience #1:

Standards come together in many different ways

Started; 2,500 parks for Corps of Engineers

Mapping central to park and trail signing.

If map works, signing will work

Standardization creates a brand

Others build to the geologic or historical context.

3

3) Related Experience #2: Signage is a functional tool.

Design improves public safety for motorists, boaters and cyclists.

A new typeface for U.S. highways aids older drivers

Waterway for boaters. Others aid paddlers in fast water.

Recreation symbols used nationwide in parks

A uniform sign system for cycling.

4

4) Related Experience #3: What we have learned

The process requires teamwork.

Through extensive design studies, research, listening to clients and adapting new methods, materials and technology we build systems that serve the visitor.

5

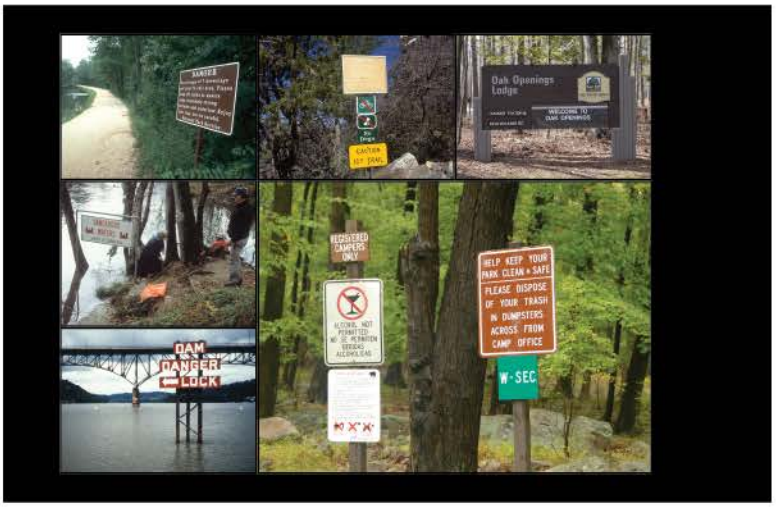
5) Learning Objectives:

- Design for consistency and readability.
- Use maps to aid understanding and orientation.
- Instruct in a respectful and informative way.
- Place information where most usable

6

6) This is where it all begins.

For many large park systems, signage has been implemented by the hands of many. This is often the beginning of our work for client.



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7) It is overwhelming

Sorting through this material in site surveys is integral to the creative process as we try to frame the requirements of a new program.

8

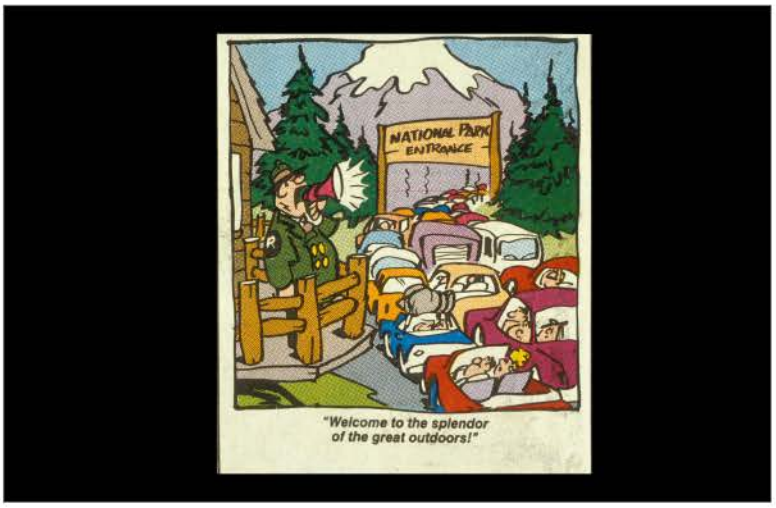
8) The lessons learned helps us adapt to each project.

9

9) Identify issues / understand assignment

In this process we work to

- understand what a visitor needs to know,
- what the organization wants the visitor to know,
- and how is that presented and maintained.



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10) Welcome to the great outdoors. It all starts at the front door.

From the front door to the head of a trail we want to know that the method for orientation, wayfinding, and instruction provides what visitor needs to know.

1970s NPS visitor services questionnaire:
What would enhance their visit to a park?

Visitors asked for . . . . . (next slide)

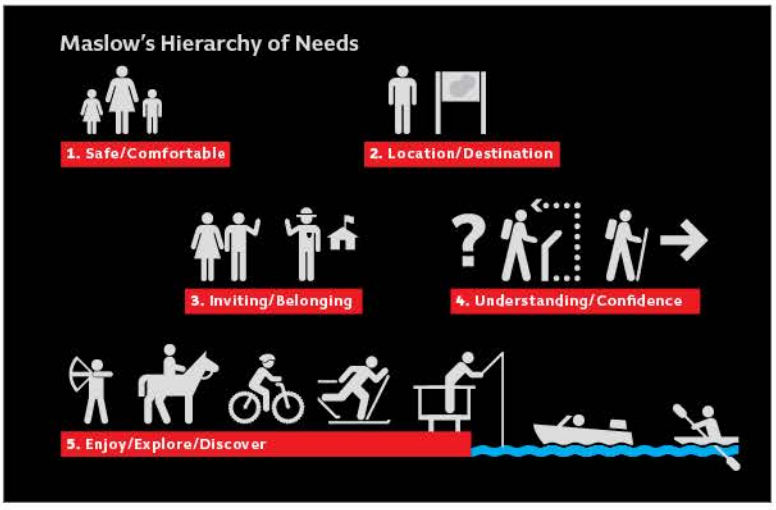
11

11) NPS Survey

- Clean restrooms
- Understandable signing
- Effective maps

Common sense but too often not provided.

I shared story with a client who responded:
"You mean Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs."



12

12) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The visitor wants:

1) to feel safe and comfortable

2) to know where they are and where they are going

3) the place to be inviting: well maintained and with responsive staff

4) to proceed with confidence and understanding

And at that point they can:
5) Explore, Enjoy & Discover

Common sense meets scientific research

13

13) How do we do this?

Process:

- Field review conditions
- Quantify message
- Determine design standards
- Design: kit of parts
- Prototype
- Implement

14

14) Existing conditions: Photo survey

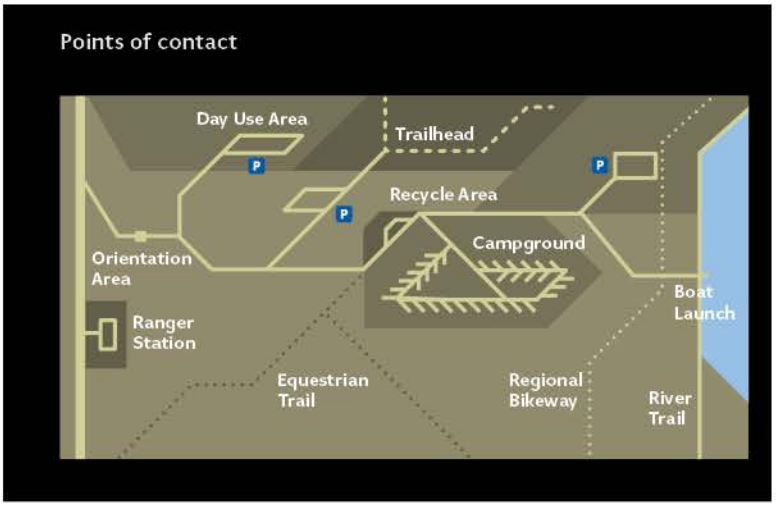
Every park has:
- different priorities, and
- a different personality.

We start with a field survey. We want to see what is going on.

Most are existing park systems. Learn from what exists.

A bit of anthropology.

Most creative parts of this process.



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15) Points of contact

For a first-time visitor, information is not portable.

What does the visitor need to know at every point of contact.

Complete kit of parts. It also informs the design process.

The more site specific you can get, the more effective the message.

16

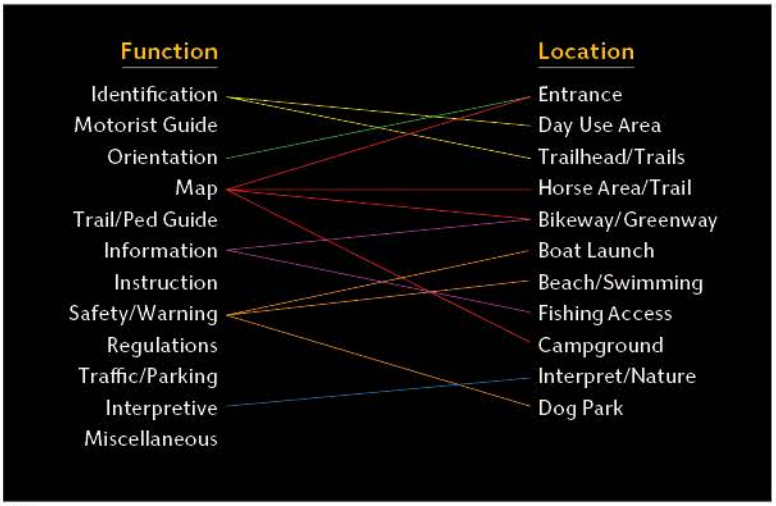
16) Analysis

- **Organize by function**
- **Organize by location**

Identify what is important and what to remove

Identify what refine, update or incorporate in a different way

Note: a system will be built over time



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17) Function / Location

To build your kit of parts, we look at what is needed by location and function

We look at synergy of the parts
(size, type of message) and what it is intended to work with

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18) Design

Size

Content

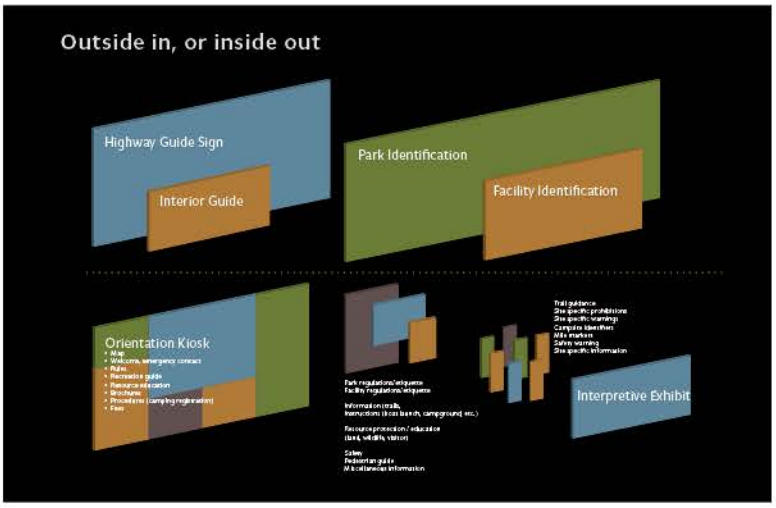
Typography

Graphic elements

Color

Formats

and, relationship to the whole.



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19) Outside-in or Inside-out

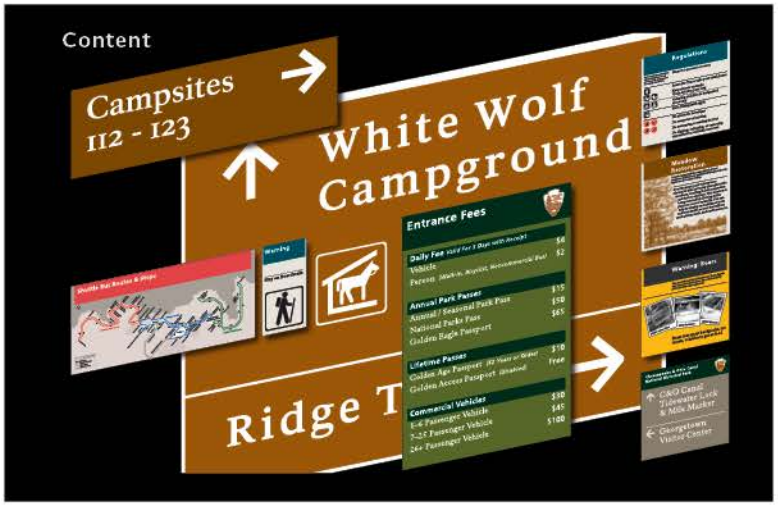
For every big sign there are many small signs.

It is the small signs that touch the visitor as they use the park.

Many small signs are displayed with other small signs, and introduces the need for modularity.

Many of the signs become universal “catalog” panels. Others have site specific content (a trail guide sign, fee schedule, or map with unique “you are here” label).

This is where digital technology for printing, and inventory management systems and archived artwork come together.



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20) Content

Content

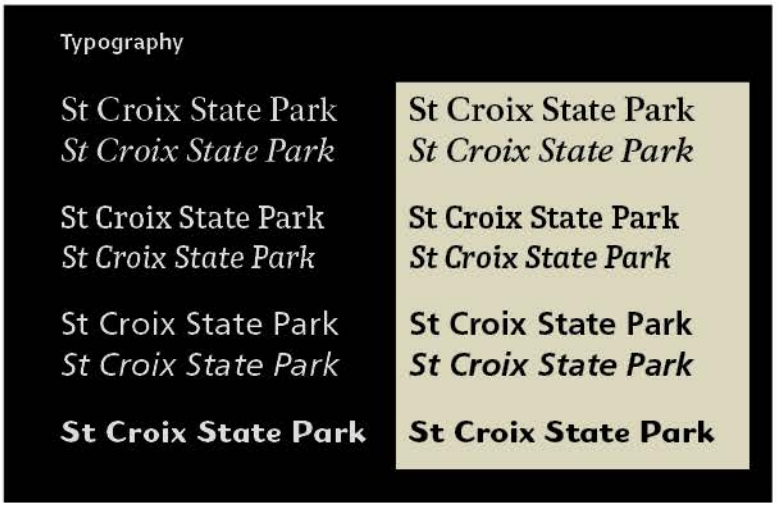
Subject identification

Brevity

Consistency

Graphic structure

Visual cues



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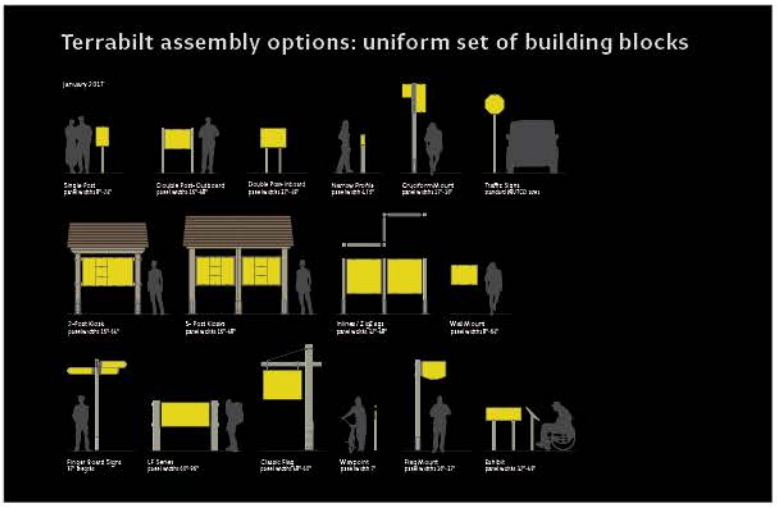
21) Typography

Accommodate all applications

Consistent, typeface and format creates the brand.

Example: Roman, slab serif, sans serif;

Open shapes, even stroke, multiple weights



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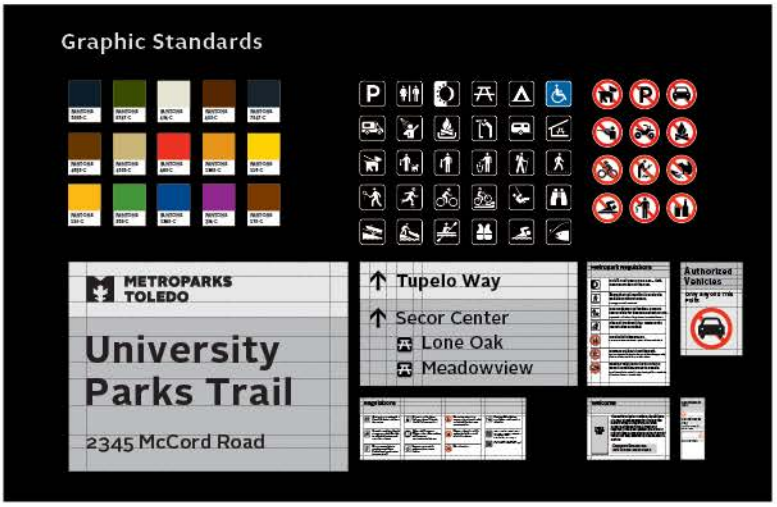
22) Structures

The sign structure is the delivery mechanism.

We work to create structures that are efficient, are size appropriate to the graphics and the landscape, and are flexible relative to graphics placed on them.



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23) Graphic Standards

Basic building blocks

System includes: Typeface, format, color, size, & form

Applications are designed based on function.

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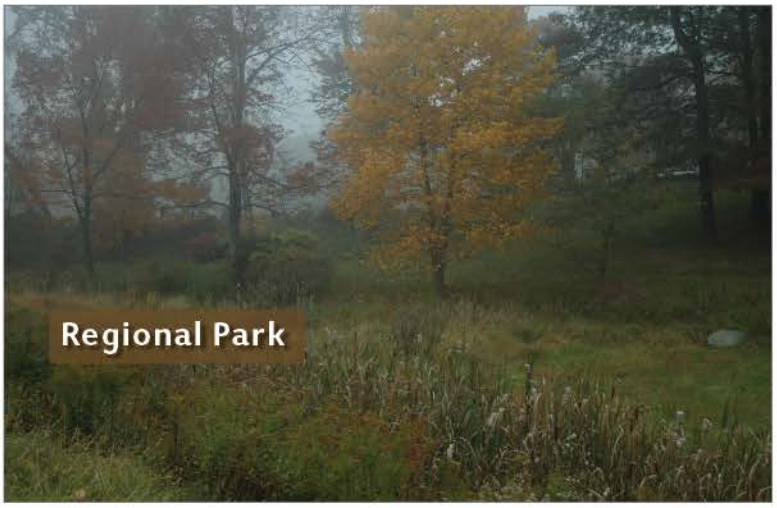
24) Coming through the front door

I will share one complete case study and some mini case studies on common applications: motorist guide, trail access, rules and outdoor ethics.



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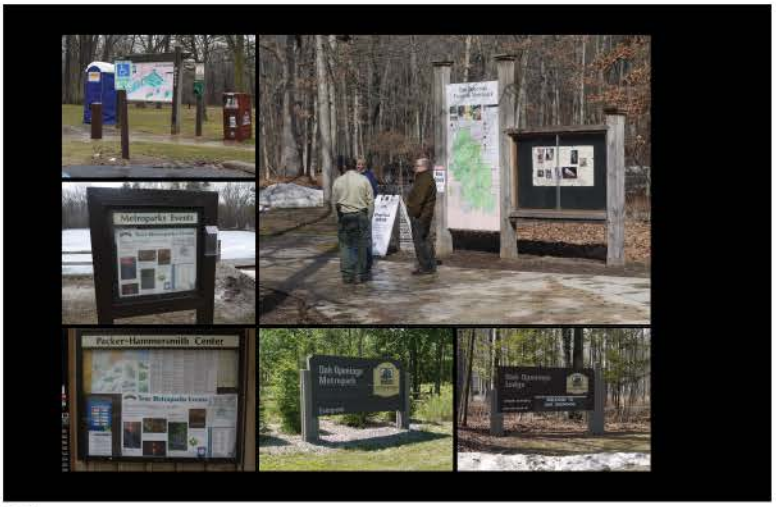
25) Regional Park

This is a mid-western version of county parks.

An Ohio Metropark system with 23 parks and trails (bike, hike, and paddle).



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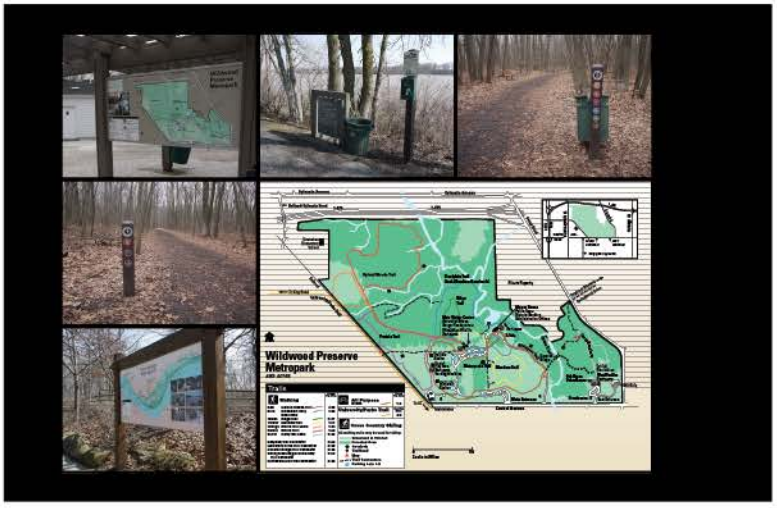
26) Existing Conditions

The client is a customer driven organization.

Existing signage was tired and the messaging was incomplete.



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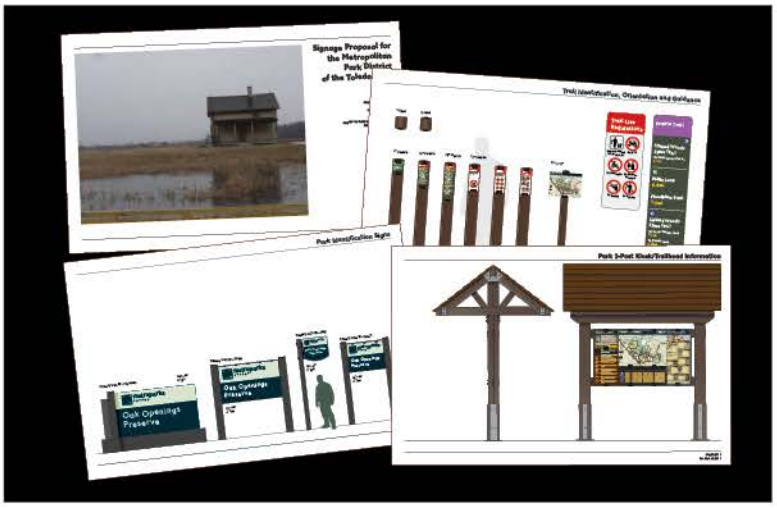
27) Existing Conditions

Trails were signed by color, but color to what?

Guidance incomplete.

- Seniors
- Runners
- First time users



28

28) Findings report

recommendations based on function and types of facilities.

We no longer build sign manuals.
We document our designs which in turn guide the process.

In a digital age it makes more sense.
It is also a better allocation of customer resources.

We build around priorities (trail & maps, Id comes at the end.)

29

29) Motorist Guide

Guiding the motorist to the proper parking area or facility in a park becomes the first step.

Once out of the car, the size and character of information is on a pedestrian scale.

30

30) New map

We created a new map that was smaller and easier to read.

31

31) Map detail

Re-ordered trial routes:
spines, loops and a few connectors to enhance use.

Each trail was identified by color and name.

Distance was shown in 1/10 increments

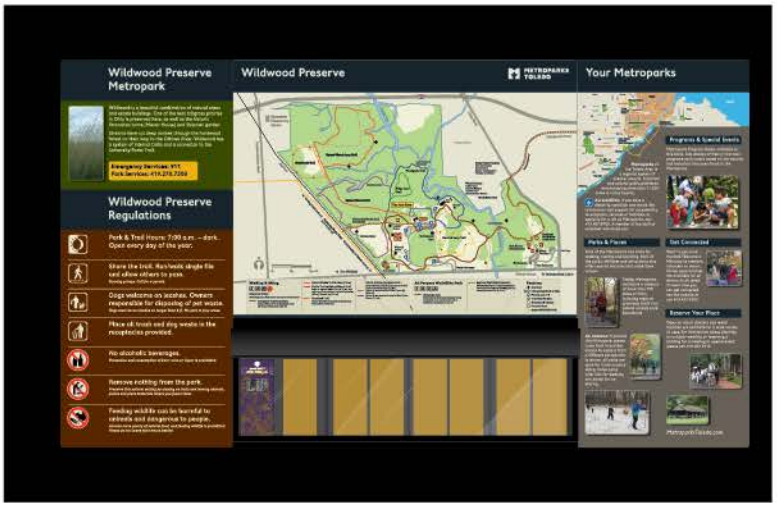
32

32) Orientation Kiosk

The map size was reduced by 83 percent

Kiosk includes: map, rules, emergency access, park system offerings and brochure.

The sizing works for folks in a wheel chair or standing as a 5 feet or 6 feet tall.



33

33) Orientation Kiosk

This anticipates what a visitor needs to know.

The base module is 16” x 12”.

In this case the client is putting the same message on both sides.

34

34) Orientation Kiosk

The kiosk becomes a signature element at each parking area.

The map draws the visitor in.

35

35) System of Maps

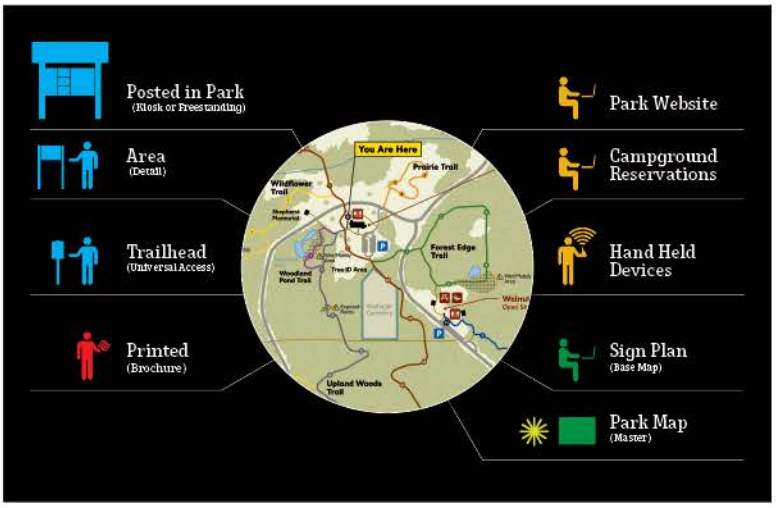
Modular format. Maps designed for readability.

- regional park and trail corridor
- regional group of parks and historic sites
- park trails and parking
- campground
- river walk
- towpath trail

36

36) System of Maps

Each map has an emphasis



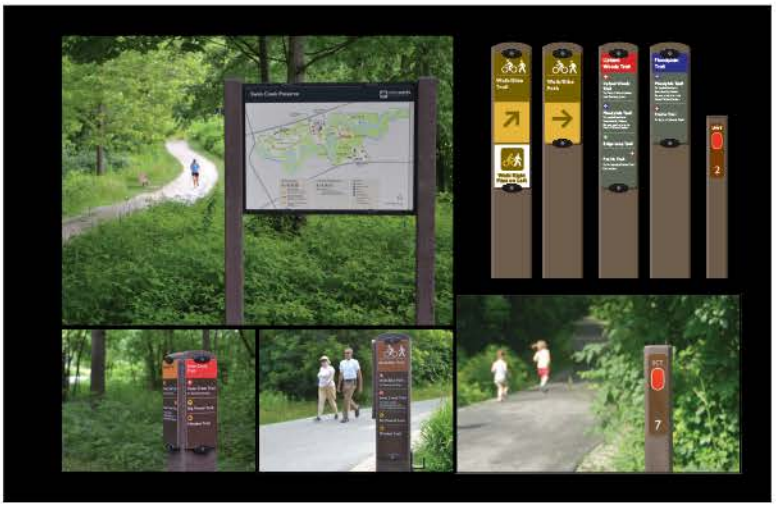
37

37) Map is central to all communications

From your initial visit on the web to the park, a consistent map helps inform the experience.

The map that works across all media: signs, print and digital.

Map becomes a great investment because touches your customer in every way that they visit a park.



38

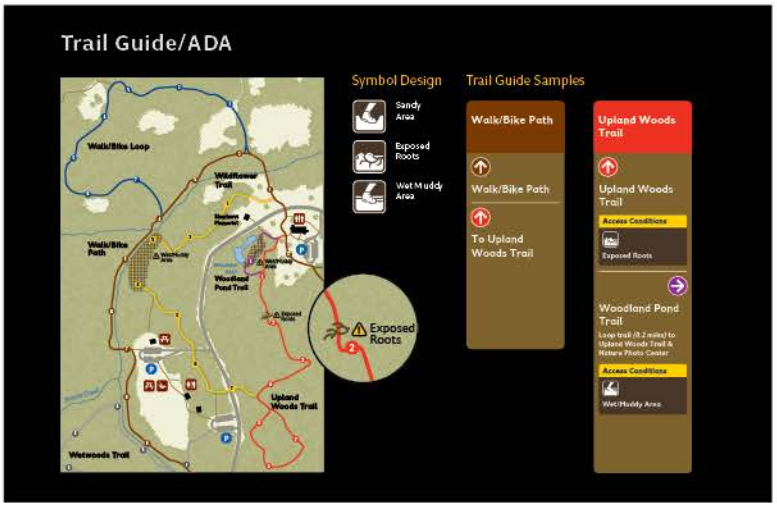
38) Trail Signing

New guide signing linked map by name and color. Guidance will always get you home.

Plan: Map, directional guide sign, & waypoints creates a complete system

- Seniors
- Runners
- First time users

Use of the trails increased. Regular users of all ages were empowered to go on routed unfamiliar before.



39

39) Trail Access (ADA)

Now identifying access conditions on trail maps and placing redundant cues on trail guide signs.

The feedback we have received is that this is a helpful. This allow a person with a particular disability to selectively plan a hike based on specific location of impediment.

40

40) Urban Rail Corridor

This is a partnership process with City of Toledo, Metroparks and the Univ. of Toledo

A 10 mile rail trail though the city on an old right-of-way.

Kiosk adapted from our smaller trailhead structure with details similar to a train way: Steel trusses, crossing for station name, black structure to replicate iron and blue roof with a trail shed with color

41

41) Urban Rail Trail (Chessie Circle)

Designed for multi-year implementation as segments are being built in increments tied to funding.

This design/build process insures continuity with each new section.

The route includes mile markers (simulate concrete), waypoints, guide signs (lineal and lateral)

Kiosk incorporates: Corridor map, Metro bike plan, interpretation and brochure.

42

42) Water Trial Map and Signs

This was a partnership with six stake holders.

The project started with a map and signs based on mile points.

Each location is identified on signs and map with mile point as the address.

43

43) Water trail atlas segment diagram

This is one of 4 segment maps we designed as a pocket guide for paddlers

Detailed description of each put-in/take out, and safety information easy to reference.

This eliminates the need to unfold and refer to site information that is often in a table on the back of the map.

44

44) Information and Exhibits

From fishing rules that show the local species at actual size to guidance in a bird watching shelter, we try to tailor the information to the way the facility is used.

45

45) Waysides

Work with Toledo Metroparks writers, designers and illustrators.

From the Battle of Fallen Timbers 1794, to exhibits on natural science and bird watching.

In this case we designed and fabricated the waysides as a borderless display mounted on stone specified by the park architect.

46

46) Park Identification

Park identification: bow on the package.
Historical reference to WPA and CCC

Why the flags? smaller and taller

47

47) Summary for Metroparks

Signage integral to park program

Clear management plan

Client takes over planning

Designer encouraged to advise

48

48) Mini-Studies

Instruction: Campsite Reservation
Instruction: Bear Awareness
Instruction: Invasive Species
Information: ADA Trails
Information: Outdoor Ethics
Rules: Etiquette & Expectations

Every park is unique

Safety or a procedure is not obvious

Inform presented in a respectful way

49

49) Instruction: Campsite Reservation

50

50) Existing conditions: Park Map

Provincial Parks are the Canadian equivalent to a State Park.

Imagine arriving late at night and finding your spot

51

51) Existing Conditions: Self-Registration Instructions

If you did not register on line .....

Imagine sorting this one out with three hungry kids ready to pitch the tent.

This initial point of contact for an entering visitor should be easy to understand.

52

52) New Park Map design

In the design process we begin with a map that clearly identifies the facilities

53

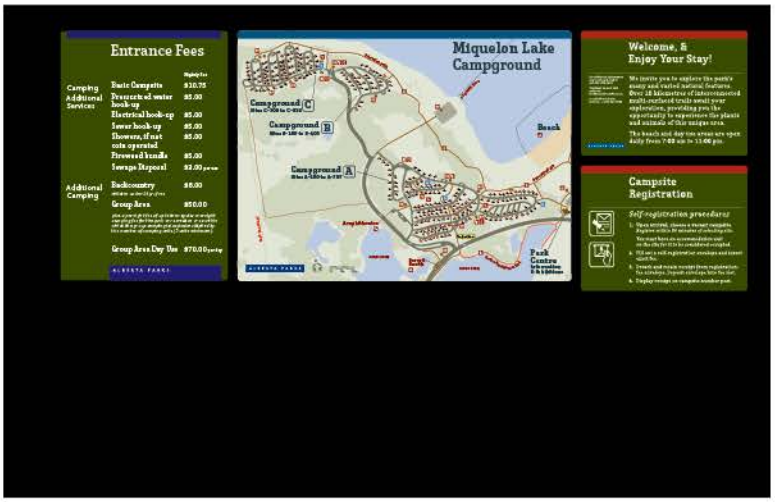
53) Detail of Campground

This map provides greater detail map specific to the site.

Campsites are uniformly drawn

Numbered by loop

All service areas identified



54

54) Registration and rules panels

In the campground, the instructions, rules and fees are use a common graphic system.

We build around a set of modules. Content is edited for simplicity, and panel sized for readability.

55

55) Mock up

As a design evolves, we mock-up in various ways to allow our client to see how the system will work.

We want to know: Is it visually appropriate to the site and easily read from the distance at which it is viewed?

56

56) Campground registration station

And, we illustrate how a kiosk can be used to create an informative modular display.

57

57) Instruction: Bear Awareness

58

58) Existing conditions

We surveyed the locations for 96 trailheads

59

59) Simulation

In this project we advised on the map design

Designed the back country rules panel and bear awareness panels.

The 4th location is a bulletin board for schedules

60

60) Bear awareness information

We did this before in Yosemite but the information in this was far more extensive

We designed for the streaker, stroller and the student

Organized the information in clear groups.

61

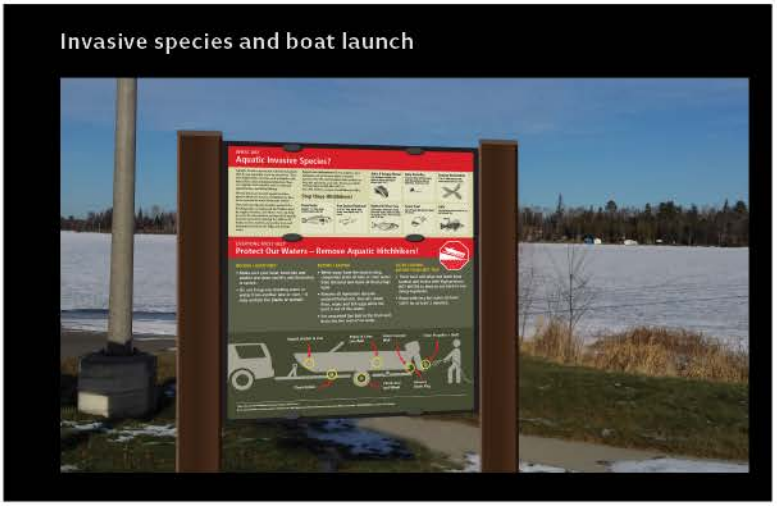
61) Instruction: Invasive Species

62

62) Existing conditions

This is a state park. The concept of small standard panels makes sense but there is no “take away”.

It is a visual assault.

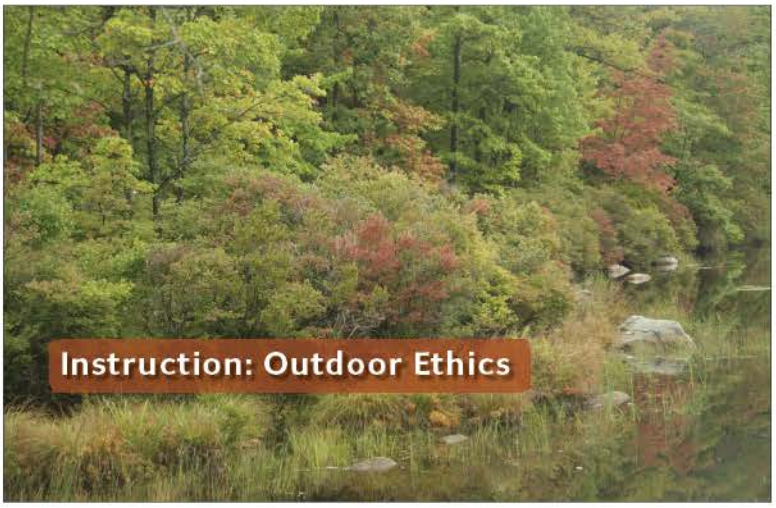


63

63) Invasive species and boat launch

Our designs for protecting waterways eliminated acronyms and language that may not be clear for all readers.

We attempted to visualize, distill and group the requested action



64

64) Instruction: Outdoor Ethics

We call this resource education or resource protection

65

65) Outdoor Ethics

We appreciate the concept of "Outdoor Ethics" but the delivery is so generic we loose the opportunity to have a teachable moment

66

66) Outdoor Ethics

It is what we call:

- Protecting the visitor
- Protecting the environment
- Protecting the wildlife

This illustrates the subject:

- clear headline
- illustration that is easy to understand
- describes why a visitor is being informed
- identifies action to comply
- describes consequences of compliance.

These in turn become a standard set of tiles that can be used in a site specific way throughout a park system.

67

67) Outdoor Ethics

" In the end
we will conserve only what we love,
we will love only what we understand,
we will understand only what we are taught"

- Baba Dioum, Senegalese Environmentalist, 1968

68

68) Rules: Etiquette & Expectations

Rules and regulations with the common complaint from park staff. "We post them and no one reads them."

69

69) Etiquette & Expectations

Provide information specific to the location where it is posted.

The goal is to focus on what is important and present in a way that is easy to read. (Too much information is deadly.)

Always be consistent area to area and park to park, but identify the area being referenced (campground, boat launch, etc.).

70

70) Etiquette & Expectations

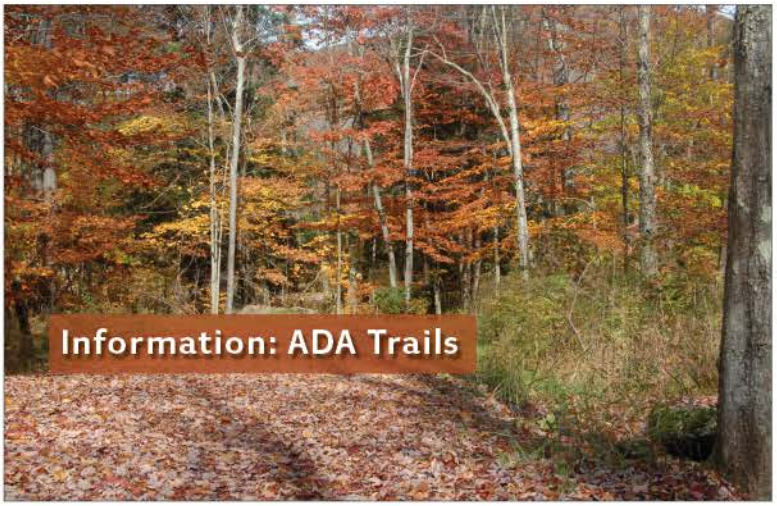
The type of rule or regulation should be tailored to the location and what is most important at that point.

From entering a park we provide 4 key rules that cover 50% of expectations,

to rules in a campground

instructions in a kiosk or along a trail to walking into a trail network

Rules take many forms that should be helpful, not punitive.



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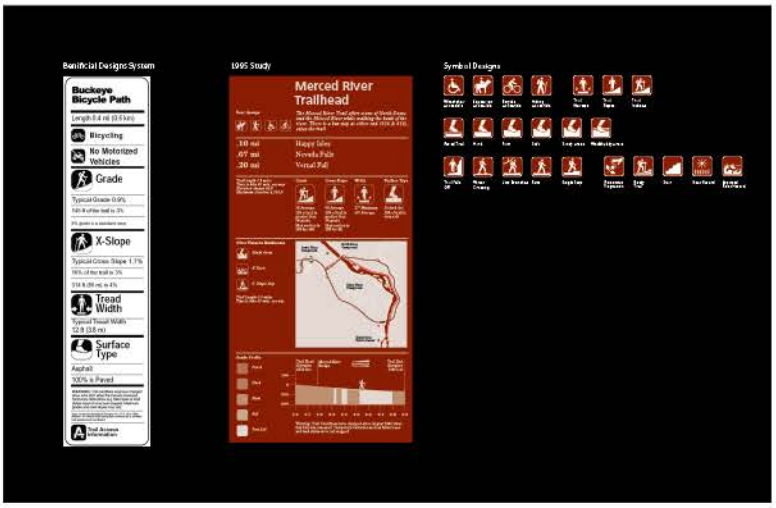
71) Trail Access (ADA)

On front country recreation trails this is now part of ADA.

Back country and wilderness trails are exempted from the rule.



72

72) Trail Access (ADA)

Current guidelines (shown on the far left) are as unworkable as nutrition guidelines on a box of Frosted Flakes.

This averages overall trail, and does not provide a clear review of where the impediment is located.

Our first attempt twenty years ago (brown panel) added a map and section drawing but was still too complicated.

We also developed a set of symbols to help illustrate the condition.

73

73) Trail Access (ADA)

Our current work that builds on (ADA) guidelines includes a narrative description, map with conditions noted, description of condition by location, and allowed use and rules.

The development of this consolidated approach eliminated six-to twelve individual signs used on trailheads studied while providing more information at each.

A system: The trailhead sign is augmented with guide signs, site specific safety warnings and waypoints along the route.

74

74) Trail Access (ADA)

The result is a very ordered trailhead as the ambiguity of many signs eliminated with one predictable posting.

75

75) Closing

76

76) Conclusion

Maps are the magnet

Anticipate visitor needs

Place information where most effective

Consistency is creativity

The brand is the aggregate statement

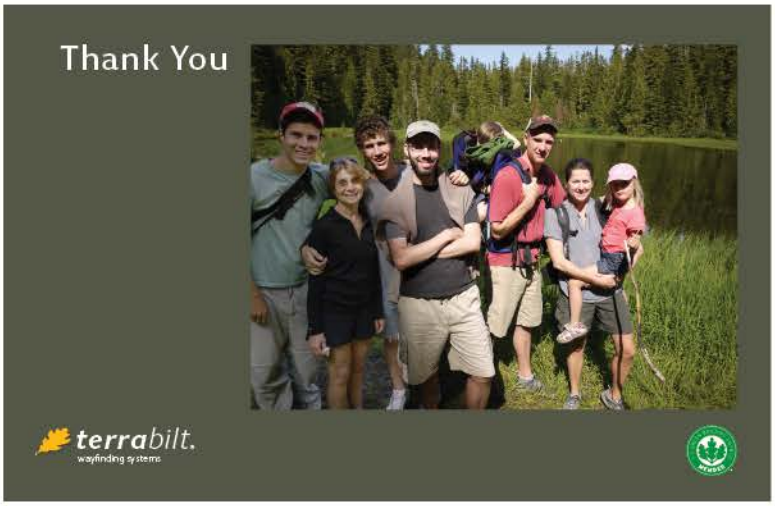
The elements of wayfinding are a series of visual, editorial and environmental cues to help visitors navigate and experience your park or trail without confusion or conflict; the cues must enhance their enjoyment and understanding of the parks and trails without damaging the rich natural and cultural resources.

This system of designs should be inviting to use, consistent, sustainable, manageable and go lightly on the land.

77

77) Wayfinding

Quote from NPS



78

78) Thank you

Questions?