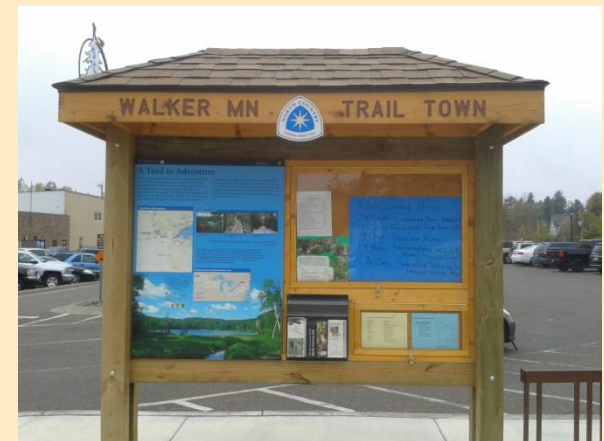
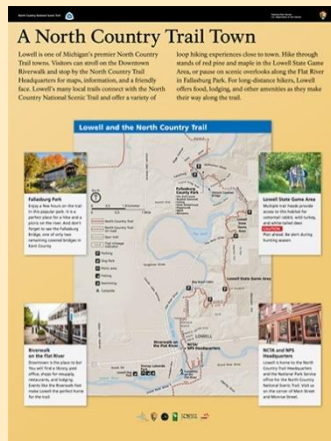




Informational and Interpretive Sign Process Guidelines

North Country National Scenic Trail



NCTA and NPS have developed standard informational sign templates for use along the North Country National Scenic Trail.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help volunteers and partners use the panel templates to fit their needs and to help identify when they may need something different.

Contents

- A. Definitions
- B. Using or Modifying the Templates
- C. Identifying sign needs and locations
- D. Creating a new design
 - 1. Text
 - 2. Graphics
 - 3. Sign Size
 - 4. Layout
- E. Sign Materials and Mount Options
- F. Funding



A. Definitions

Informational sign

Purpose: To welcome, orient and inform visitors about the site and managing agency.

Content: Site or regional overview, rules, maps, contact information, things to do or see.

Format: Larger, typically vertical and upright for high visibility from parking lot or trailhead.



Interpretive sign

Purpose: To connect visitors to an object or place (natural, cultural, geological, technological) using provocation, relevance and other techniques.

Content: A concise thematic story about the object or place being viewed, incorporating visuals (diagrams, maps, illustrations, photos) and *minimal* text.

Format: A variety of sizes, typically placed at an angle to allow visitors to better view the object or place that is the subject of the sign.



Shoreline restoration

B. Using or Modifying the Templates

Templates are available for your use. *Contact NCTA to get the design templates.*

What is a template?

A template provides a “look” that identifies the North Country Trail. Templates incorporate consistent fonts, colors and layout.

Available Templates

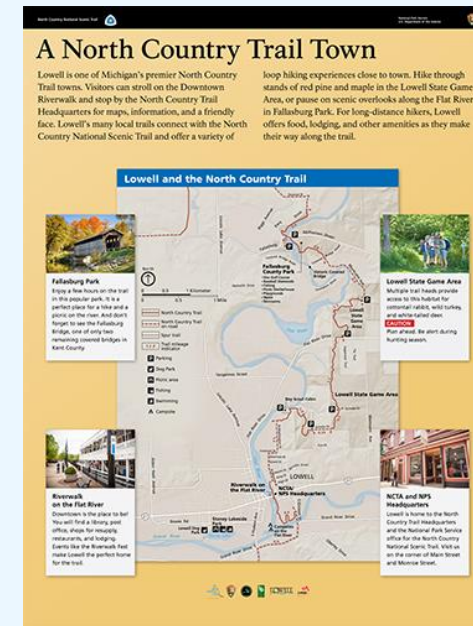
State Templates

are available for every state and introduce the North Country Trail in your state. They provide general, state-wide information.



Local Templates

focus on a specific location on the trail such as a town, or small portion of the trail.

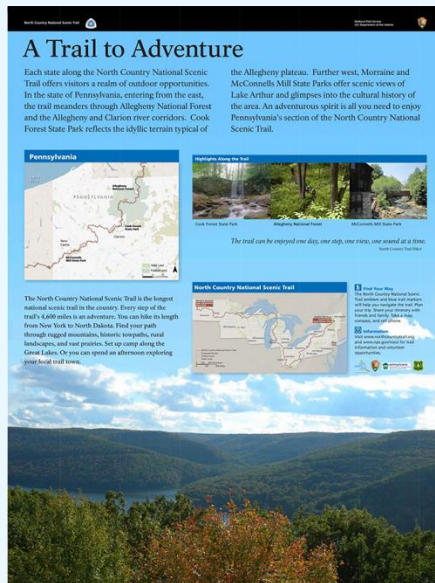


Use of the template is optional.

You may choose to:

- Use the designed template “as is”
- Modify the template
- Create a new design (when the template won't work)

Using the designed ready-to-print template “as is”.



State templates can be printed with no changes to the text or photos, or you may . . .

Modify the template



Size, type of information and images are flexible. The template can be modified to accommodate.

Ready-to-Print State Templates Contain:

Size

Vertical 48"h x 36"w.



Text.

- Description of the trail scenery in that state.
- Overview of the North Country Trail.
- "Find Your Way" information.
- Opportunity to get more information or become involved.

Graphics.

- Map of the entire trail and a map of the trail within in the state.
- Photos of three points of interest -- "Highlights Along the Trail".
- Background vista photo.
- Logos of cooperating agencies.

NOTE: The purpose is to promote the trail. The maps are not detailed enough to be used as a navigational tool for hikers.

Best Locations.

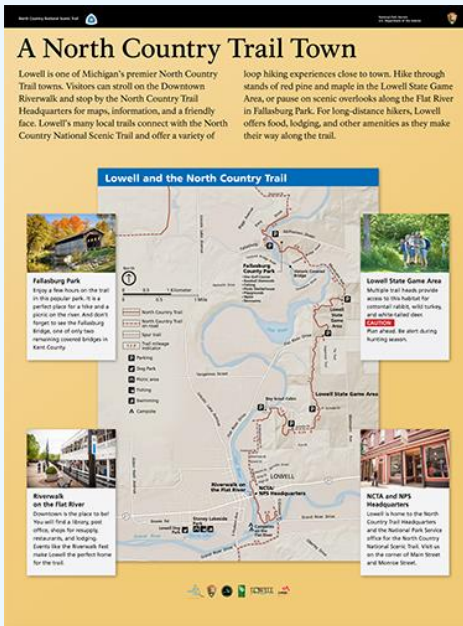
Visitor centers, rest stops, towns and public lands along the trail.

Local/Trail Town Template

This template is modified to contain text, images and maps specific to your local site.

Size.

Vertical 48”h x 36”w



Text.

- Promotes the town or local area.
- Welcomes hikers and visitors.
- Invites readers to explore the town or trail section.
- A five sentence overview the local area covered. The four points of interest each have 2-3 sentences of text. This comes to about 300 words of text total.

Graphics.

- Enlarged map including the portion of the NCT that runs through the local area. Contact the NCT Assn. cartographer for assistance.
- Amenities along the way.
- High resolution photos of the four points of interest.
- High resolution logos of cooperating agencies.

All templates may be modified
to fit your needs.

C. Identifying Sign Needs and Locations

The following are two ways to determine sign needs:

1. Identifying Audience: To determine the type of sign to create, it is important to determine your **target audience**.

Who are you creating the sign for?



- *Thru-hikers*. This group may need information about:
 - a. Local town amenities
Type of Sign: Local /Trail Town template
Location: Trailhead in town
 - b. Trail navigation at a junction
Type of Sign: Creating a new sign with trail map only
Location: Trail junction
- *Day users*. This group may be looking for local trail information and destinations along that portion
Type of Sign: Local/Trail Town template
Location: Trailhead
- *Potential users*. This group is being introduced to the North Country Trail.
Type of Sign: State NCT template
Location: Rest stop, visitors center, etc.

2. Identifying Questions: Another approach to determine a sign need is to assess the **questions** frequently being asked. For example, questions may be . . .

- Site Specific/Interpretive: Was this rock wall once part of a building?
Type of Sign: new design providing interpretive information
Location: placed at the rock wall
- General: What is the North Country Trail?
Type of Sign: NCT state template
Location: high visitation area
- About Access: Where do I find the trail?
Type of Sign: Local/Trail Town sign
Location: near trailhead or other central location
- About Uses: Can I fill in the blank: camp, cut firewood, drink the water on the trail?
Type of Sign: new design providing rules and safety information
Location: near trailhead



Determining your sign location



Consider obstacles and distractions.

Ask yourself:

- What obstacles are blocking the view? Should/can the obstacles be moved or should the sign be relocated?
- Are there other signs at the site? If yes, can they be combined with your new sign to cause less distraction?

Consider safety. Where will the reader be standing?



Be aware of hazards such as objects to back into or trip over.



Be aware of hazards such as roadways or bike paths.



Will your sign be inside a building or outdoors?

An outdoor free-standing sign requires a more durable material than a wall-mounted interior sign. Indoor signs use a thinner laminate and are less expensive.

For Informational signs, also consider:



Is the sign easily seen from a parking area or trail?



If a map is included:
Can the sign be placed so that the map is oriented to the landscape?

Don't locate your sign where it could intrude on the interpretive or photographic experience. For example, don't place a sign directly in front of an historic structure or cemetery. This prevents people from being able to "go back in time" when experiencing the site. Such a sign also makes the site difficult to photograph.

This sign is placed slightly away from the historic home. It doesn't block the view, and lets people better immerse themselves in the site.



Lastly: Do you have permission to install a sign at your selected location?



Please: take a photo of the location, identify it with your chapter and priority number and include it with the completed assessment tool.

D. Creating a new design

Do you need something different? There may be situations where the template will not fit your needs. Following is information to help you design your own unique sign.



Topics

1. Text
2. Graphics
3. Sign Size
4. Layout

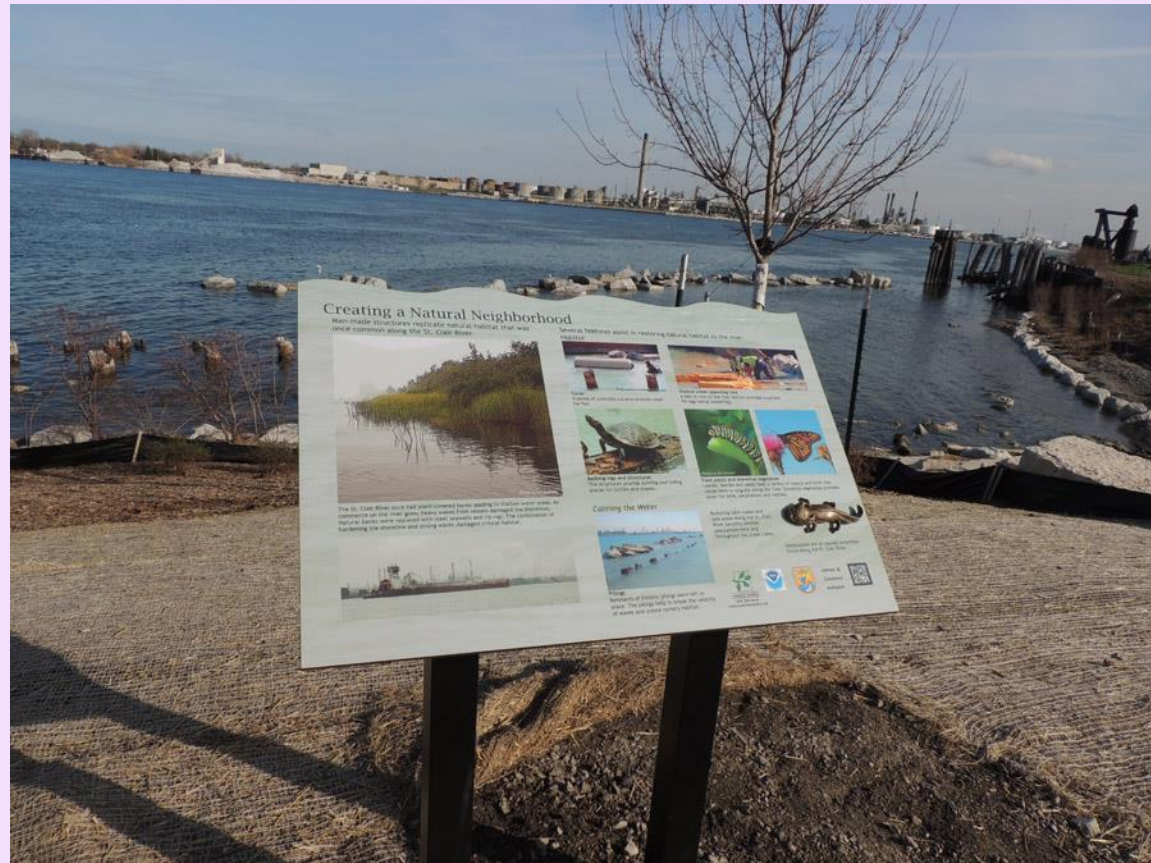
1. Text

The most difficult task in creating an informational or interpretive sign is keeping text brief.

Why should text be brief?

1. Signs are visual.
2. Your audience is voluntary.
3. Signs provide basic information.

- Signs are a visual/graphic means of communication. Text should be minimal. Let the graphics dominate the panel and “hook” the reader.



- Your audience is voluntary with a recreation goal. If your sign contains large blocks of text, they may choose not to invest the time in reading it.



Hikers will not stop to read this sign. Not only is there too much text, but the font size is below the 24 pt. minimum required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- The purpose of a sign is to provide *basic information* and *spark an interest*.

Writing *less* is harder to
do than writing *more*.

Remember, 24 point font is the *smallest* font size you can use on the panel and meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It does not take too many words to fill up a sign panel. Don't create a "brochure on a stick".

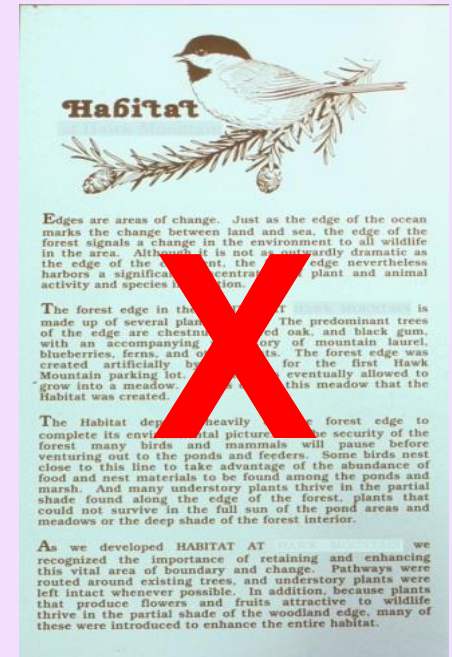


77 words

12" x 12"

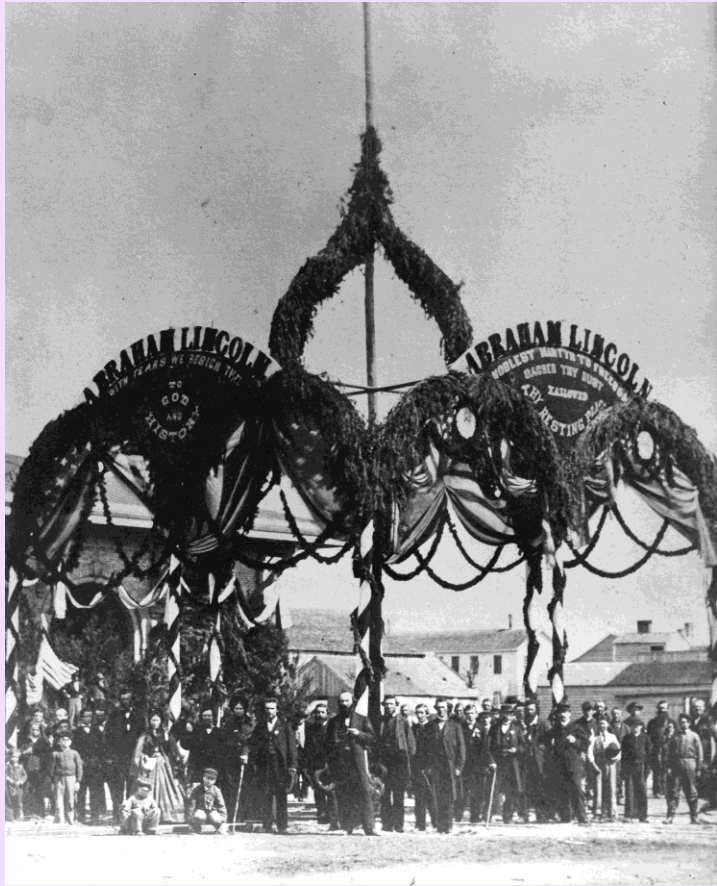


210 words 36" x 24"



318 words 12" x 24"

2. Graphics



Lincoln funeral train stop.

A picture is
worth a thousand
words.

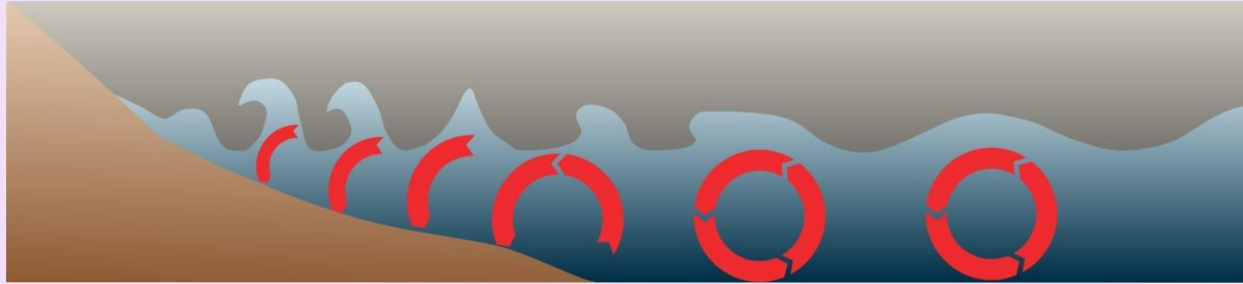
Signs are a *visual* form of communication. Images are key to a sign's success. Selecting high quality, relevant images will attract people to your sign.

There are many types of images that can be incorporated into your sign. Select the type of image that best communicates your message.



Diagrams

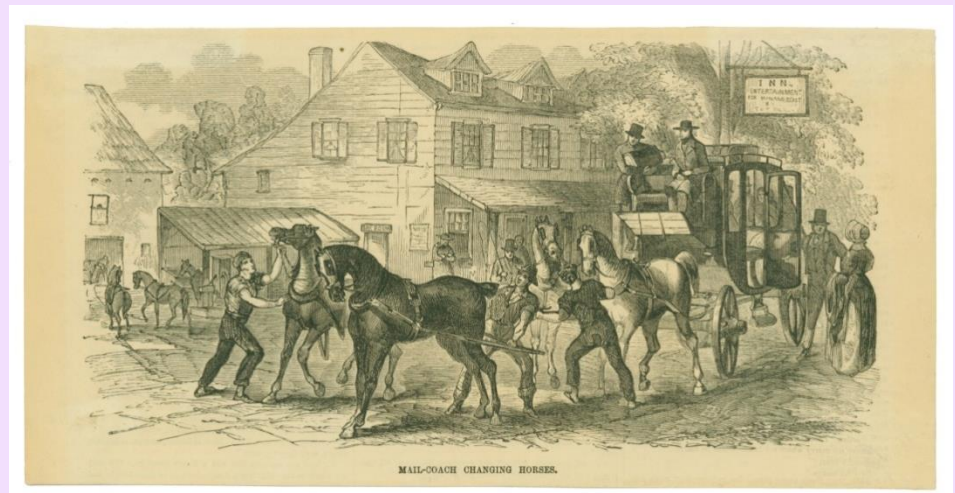
A diagram may illustrate a concept better than a photograph . For example:



Caption: When wave energy passes through water into a shallow area, the waves break. The lower part of the circular motion slows down as it scrapes the shallow bottom. The upper part of the wave continues moving forward until it falls into the air, or breaks.

Historic Images

Historic images can provide an excellent way to communicate what a place once looked like. They can take the reader back in time, creating a “sense of place”.



Original Artwork

Original artwork may at times work better than a photograph, especially when identifying a plant or animal.

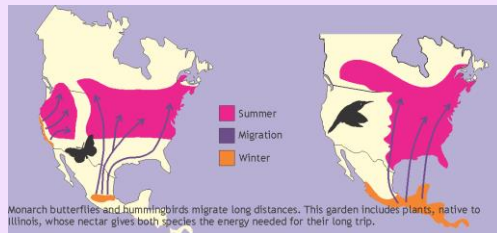
Commissioned artwork can be expensive. You may purchase a single-use piece, for a lower price.

Use of any artwork other than your own may require permission and a credit line.



Maps

Maps are good for orientation, identifying a feature or historical event, plant and animal ranges, human or animal migrations, etc.



NOTE: NCTA's cartographer may or may not be available to create your maps depending on current workload. Contact Matt Rowbotham to discuss your options.

Logos

Logos can be used to identify managing agencies. They are also used to acknowledge donors and granting organizations.

As with any graphic:

Logos must be of **high resolution** as it will be enlarged. Do not copy and paste a logo off the agency's web site. Contact the agency or organization directly for a print-quality logo and for approval of use.



Points to remember . . .

Image Resolution

Whatever type of image you select, it must have a very high resolution.

Images are enlarged when they are placed on the sign. At their full physical size, they must minimally be 150 dpi (dots per inch). A lower dpi will give the image a pixelated, speckled, or blurry appearance.

Most individual image file sizes are over 1M in order to meet the 150 dpi minimum.



Enlarged to size needed for sign, the low resolution photo becomes blurry.

Permission

Get permission to use any image or logo that is not your own.

Credit the image as per the artist/photographer's instructions.

Never “copy and paste” an image off the internet.



Courtesy of Indiana Historical Society

3. Sign Size

In some cases (existing kiosks, wall space in interior locations), the panel size is determined by the space available.



Sizes that can work well:

Informational signs: 36"w x 48"h, upright portrait orientation.

Interpretive signs: 36"w x 24"h, angled landscape orientation.

Rail mount size: 36"w x 12"h, angled landscape orientation.

Other panel sizes can be created.

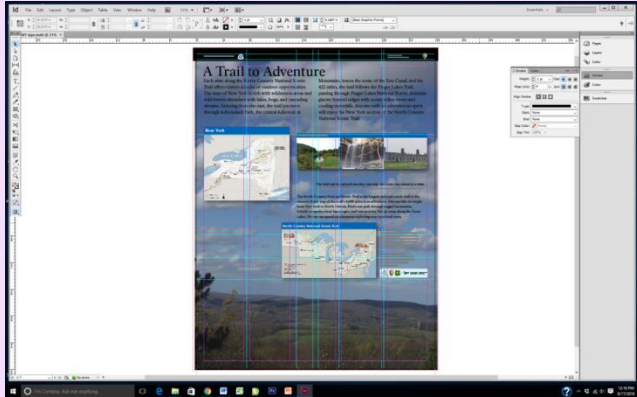


4. Layout

Once you have your text written and graphics collected, it is time to begin the layout. It is helpful to have a sign material and company selected at this point. Each sign company will have *design guidelines* that cover how to prepare files for production. Knowing the design guidelines in advance will prevent having to re-design your sign for production.

Company design guidelines, typically available on their website, may include:

- accepted software programs
- the amount of “bleed” needed along edges
- how close photos or other objects can come to the edges (important if your sign requires a frame)
- color matching requirements



Who Does the Design?

1. In-house: Perhaps you or someone in your organization has design skills.

2. Local Design Companies: Graphic designers can take your text and graphics and place it in a layout compatible with your selected sign company. Give them the design guidelines to work with.

3. Fabrication Company Designer: Some sign manufacturers have designers on staff. You would need to provide the text and graphics to them.

If you are using the template: The templates currently use InDesign software which is an Adobe product. While the template can be re-created in other programs, the process will be quicker if InDesign is used.

E. Sign Materials and Mount Options

There are many types of sign materials. Each has their best application. Remember, a trail sign is doing its job in all kinds of weather and must hold up against possible vandalism. An investment up front may prevent constant replacement expenses.

Some material options follow. Please note that Price Range does not include mounts, shipping and design expenses.



Sign Materials

1. High Pressure Laminate

Description: inkjet print sandwiched between multiple layers of melamine and phenolic sheets pressed at high pressure and heat to form a solid core.

Strengths: no de-lamination, excellent image quality, made of 30% recycled materials, hard surface, can be made self-supporting at 1/2" thick. Difficult to vandalize. Graffiti can be removed without damaging the finish.

Weaknesses: can be expensive

Warranty: 10 years

Price Range for 2' x 3' panel: \$300 - 450



2. Fiberglass Embedded

Description: paper inkjet print saturated with fiberglass resin and baked at high temperatures to form a single core.

Strengths: no de-lamination, good image quality, hard surface, resistant to shattering, weathering and fading

Weaknesses: will require a frame in most instances. If not properly sealed, the sign can be subject to water intrusion. May require occasional buffing with sandpaper or car polish

Warranty: 10 years

Price Range for 2' x 3' panel: \$350 – 400.



3. Fused Polycarbonate

Description: vinyl inkjet print fused between two sheets of UV resistant polycarbonate.

Strengths: excellent image quality, no delamination, made of 30% recycled materials, can be used in underwater applications, can be made self-supporting (1/4, 1/2-inch thicknesses available)

Weaknesses: can be scratched. Thinner panels will require backing and frame.

Warranty: 10 years

Price Range for 2' x 3' panel: \$250 - 300



4. Aluminum

Description: Aluminum covered with digital graphics.

Strengths: Cost. Good for temporary, indoor or protected situations.

Weaknesses: Not resistant to vandalism.

Warranty: none

Price Range for 2' x 3' panel: \$200 - 300

Mount Options

In-ground

Description: Thirty-six inch hole is dug and post is set in concrete. Posts are 72" long.



Best Application:
Most outdoor sites.

NOTE: This type of mount requires at least 36" of soil depth.

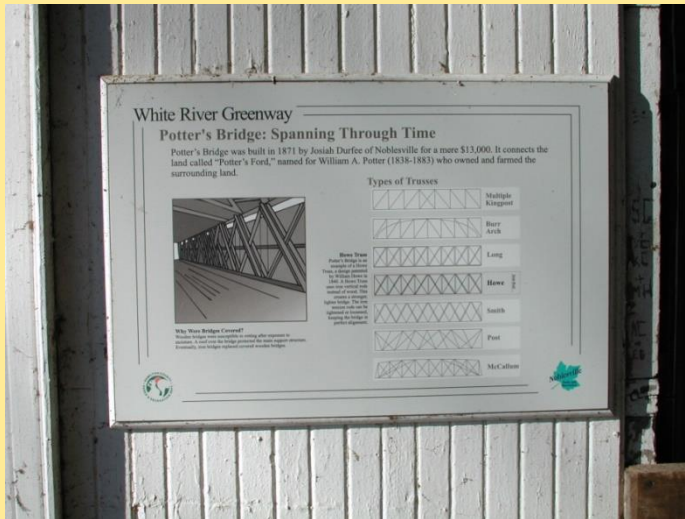


Surface Mounts

Description: Posts are attached to a hard surface using a plate with screws.

Best Application:

- Hard surfaces such as concrete or asphalt.
- Decks or boardwalks.
- Areas where topsoil is thin (plates are attached to a concrete pad).
- Archaeological site where digging is prohibited (plates are attached to a concrete pad).
- Areas where prescribed burns or other management occurs (signs can be removed during a burn).



Wall Mounts

Description: Panel is attached to a vertical surface using brackets.

Best Application:

- Indoor settings.
- Exterior walls.
- Existing kiosks.*

NOTE: Attaching a sign to an historic structure is not recommended and in some situations will be prohibited by historic preservation agencies.

*Panels may be attached to *existing* kiosks using wall mounts. They are attached to a kiosk from behind using pre-drilled, threaded inserts. You are encouraged to use the double-pedestal upright mounts for *new* kiosks.



Rail Mounts

Description: Panel is attached to a railing using clamps.

Best Application:

Sites with railings such as overlooks, boardwalks, porches.

NOTE: No two railings are alike, so rail mounts are frequently custom-made. As a result they are often the most expensive type of mount.





Variables that will impact price:

- panel size
- number of panels produced (per unit cost drops)
- number of unique designs
- type of mount
- panel thickness
- type of material
- shipping location
- design time

Request an estimate for your project to get an accurate price.

F. Funding

Once you have defined your needs and the costs, it's time to find the funds to make it a reality. Unfortunately, there is no sustained funding source to produce panels along the trail so NCTA Chapters need to be creative. Potential sources include:

- Chapter funds
- NCTA's Field Grant program
- Agency partners
- Local community grant programs

Talk with your partners and the communities near the trail to see what funding opportunities might be available. NCTA staff is happy to provide ideas or guidance in grant writing.

Questions?

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616-897-5987 ext. 2