

Chapter 7

SIGNS

In earlier times, Native Americans lashed the limbs of maple saplings or bent the entire sapling and tied it in place to mark a trail—thus leaving a sign for others. In traveling to the inland fur-gathering areas, French-Canadian voyageurs created "lop trees" to mark the portages and guide them through the maze of waterways along the Minnesota-Ontario border. These early signs were a basic form of communication.

Just as the Native Americans and voyageurs used signs to find their way through difficult areas, today's trail users rely on signs and symbols to find their way and to better understand the area. Signs identify and label facilities and points of interest. They warn hikers of dangers and unusual trail conditions. They educate hikers in the proper use of the outdoors and promote the protection of nature. Signs explain and interpret interesting natural and cultural features and management activities along the trail. They also list regulations and guidelines and serve to control unwanted or illegal activities. Perhaps most importantly, they direct the hiker by providing destinations and distances along the route.

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 which are harder to solve are often over-looked (e.g., wet areas). Consistent signs are the quickest way to increase the trail's identity and the public's support for the trail.

Other objectives are to:

1. Provide positive exposure of the trail to attract more users,
2. Educate the user about the trail through trailhead kiosks,
3. Reassure the user that he/she is on the right trail and will not get lost, and
4. Control trail usage and create a safer, more enjoyable, environmentally friendly experience.

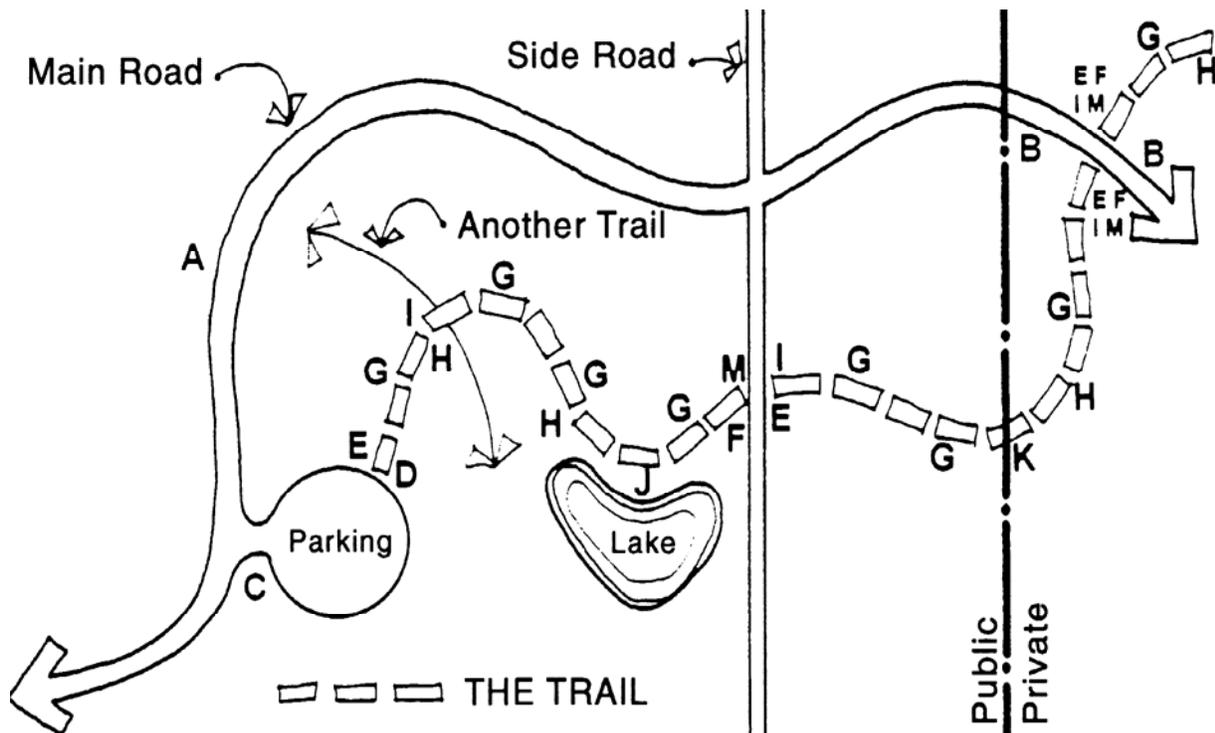
These objectives are to be balanced with aesthetic considerations to avoid "sign pollution."

The public agencies and private organizations that manage segments of the North Country NST often use a variety of signing methods. Standardization of the types and locations of signs along the trail is desired. While these standards call for new signs to replace some currently in use, this does not need to occur until the existing signs are no longer in a suitable condition. Managing authorities are urged to identify signing needs as part of the annual trail assessment process. An inventory of existing signs should be regularly updated. It is recommended that as new signs are needed—or existing signs need replacement—the uniform signing standards suggested in this chapter be followed.

TYPES OF SIGNS

The following types of signs and markers will be discussed in this chapter. See Location of Signs diagram for their relative locations.

- A. Information signs for highway users
- B. Warning (Pedestrian Crossing) signs for highway users
- C. Entrance sign
- D. Trailhead Information sign/Kiosk
- C. Regulatory (usage control) signs
- D. Road Crossing signs
- E. Reassurance markers/blazes
- F. Direction change indicators
- G. Confirmation/Identification signs (trail logos)
- E. Interpretive signs
- F. "Crossing Private Land" signs
- H. You-Are-Here signs
- I. Destination signs
- N. Boundary signs
- O. Adopter signs



A. Highway information signs

These are the typical white lettering on brown background recreation-related signs seen along highways. They can only be installed with the approval of the responsible highway department or agency that controls the road—such as the Wisconsin DOT or the Minnesota DOT. Highway departments often perform their own design work and have their own personnel install these signs. Some departments will provide the signs while others will expect to be reimbursed.

The recommended wording is: "North Country National Scenic Trail - 1000 Feet." Highway departments calculate the size of the sign and the distance from the parking lot based on the posted highway speed limit and the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).



B. Warning (Pedestrian Crossing) Signs

These are standard MUTCD Warning Signs. They have black lettering on a yellow background. These should be installed in advance of trail crossings where trail use and road conditions warrant. These signs are especially important where visibility is limited due to road curvature, vegetation, or hills. If these signs are needed, the highway department should be contacted for concurrence. They may or may not install these signs.



C. Entrance Sign

Entrance signs should be installed at all primary trailhead locations where parking is available. Preferably, the entrance sign should be two-sided and placed perpendicular to the highway, located just off the right-of-way and near the entrance road. This increases effectiveness in directing the user to the trailhead. However, because of site conditions, some entrance signs may be one-sided. If in the right-of-way, a permit must be obtained from the responsible highway department.



Entrance signs should be the standard NPS-type metal signs with white lettering on a brown background and read "North Country National Scenic Trail," with the trail logo on the right hand side. They should be approximately 3' × 6'—or another similarly proportioned size—and be mounted on solid, well designed, wooden, stone, or combination sign support structure. Optionally, a matching metal segment name strip could be mounted underneath the main sign to indicate a local trail name. If done, the lettering and color should match the main sign.

There may be other locations and situations where this sign or a smaller version may be appropriate to call attention to the trail—such as at a major recreation site.

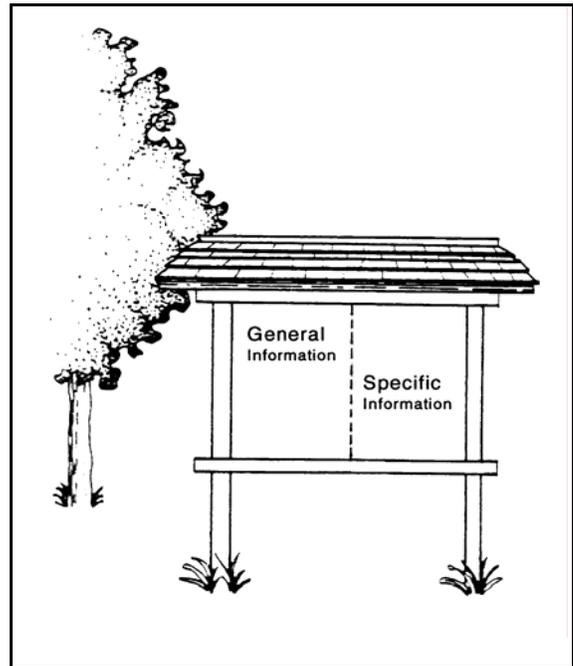
D. Trailhead Information Sign/Kiosk

A trailhead sign or kiosk should be installed at all primary trailhead locations (see Chapter 6) where parking is available. This structure should be built within 50 feet of where the trail leaves the parking lot and should include a roof and a double or triple bulletin board structure. Some agencies on the North Country NST have adopted a triple bulletin board constructed with a roof. A well designed and maintained trailhead kiosk presents a variety of information and serves to consolidate signing clutter that otherwise would be more spread out along the trail.

The left display panel should contain general information about the trail (the seven-state map)—similar to the map and information shown on the NPS brochure. It should depict the general location of the trail in relation to other major landmarks, such as the Great Lakes.

The right display panel should contain specific information about the trail segment, including local trail interpretation. A map should show the trail as far as the next trailhead in either direction. It should also include regulatory and safety information and information about temporary trail detours.

All kiosks should be either weather-tight to protect permanent information such as maps and regulations, or utilize weather/vandal resistant materials such as waxed poster board, fiberglass embedment, or other long lasting materials. Cluttering the kiosk with quickly prepared information on short lasting paper should be avoided. Frequent, regularly-scheduled maintenance of kiosk displays is imperative for maintaining a professional appearance. Replace faded display materials as necessary, remove spider webs, dead bugs, accumulated moisture, and so on. Additional interpretive information can be included on the segment map panel. Kiosks are good locations to install trail registers. Design specifications for *one style of* kiosk are shown in Appendix *3*.



E. Regulatory (usage control) Signs



While kiosks should contain information on the kinds of use allowed on the trail in a positive tone, it is recommended that all trail segments have signs which show acceptable and unacceptable uses at entry points. This is especially important where problems have occurred.

There are two options for regulatory signs. (1) Carsonite type posts with strip decals as shown at left, *and in Appendix 3-2* or (2) larger format signs mounted on Carsonite or wooden posts—to be used where the standard 3"wide vertical decals are not prominent enough, such as at busy trailheads or major road crossings. This strip decal should be placed directly below a trail identification emblem (see item I) *and can be found by any managing agency's or organization's logo (e.g., the USFS shield, the Buckeye Trail Association emblem, etc.). *

In order to avoid over-signing, these will emphasize the permitted use. On a particular segment where non-permitted uses are experienced, international symbols with a "slash" can be added lower on the post to help control the problem.

These signs should be placed at all access points such as trailheads, road crossings, junctions with other types of trails, etc. Further usage control measures, such as barriers or stiles, may have to be employed in those areas where the trail is subject to illegal use.

F. Road Crossing Signs

These provide information to the hiker, *increase trail identity and help create a “look of continuity”*—not the vehicular public. Road Crossing signs actually refer to a location—not a new category of sign. Road crossings call for a collection of other types of signs found in this chapter. At many road crossings, signing may be subtle if calling attention to the trail is not desirable. This is especially true where unacceptable parking situations could develop. Carsonite posts should be used at these locations, and where the trail crosses other significant trails, logging roads, or low speed township or county roads. They should contain:

1. Trail logo.
2. Directional arrows if there is a short jog in the trail.
3. Usage signs.
4. Name of road being crossed (optional).

At major road crossings, it may be appropriate to add a 9" trail emblem. If used, these should be mounted on a post facing and parallel to the road at the edge of the right-of-way.

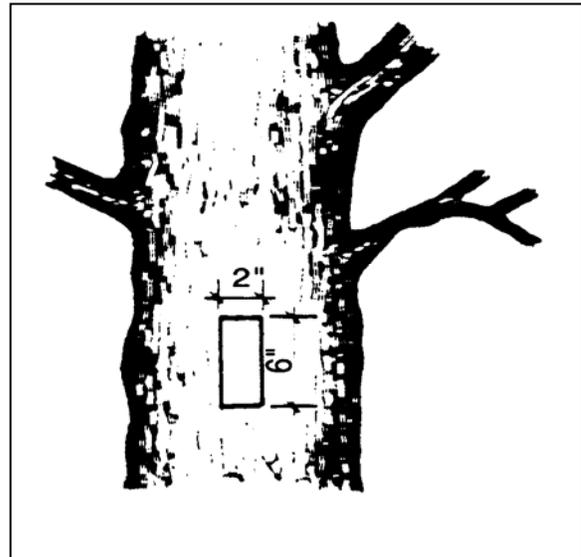
G. Reassurance Markers/Blazes

It is not cost effective or desirable to use the official trail logo as the sole marker along the trail. Other types of markers which are less costly, less visually obtrusive, and less prone to vandalism should be used between points where the official trail logo has been placed. Reassurance markers are the paint or nail-on "blazes" that mark the trail.

Blazes are placed on trees or posts, slightly above eye level so that hikers can see them easily when traveling in either direction. In areas where the trail receives winter use, blazes are placed higher so they are visible above the snow. Blazes should be within "line of sight"—when standing at a blaze marker, the hiker should be able to see the next one. Blazes should be placed on trees that "strike the eye." One well placed blaze is better than several that are poorly placed.

Blazes should be continuous—even along road segments and other unmistakable parts of the trail. Blazes should be placed immediately beyond any trail junction or road crossing—even if there is a directional sign. A second blaze (for safety) should be placed within another 50 to 100 feet. Otherwise, it is not desirable to have more than one blaze visible in either direction at any one time. However, exceeding 100 yards between blazes is not desirable. Striking a balance so as not to "over-blaze" or "under-blaze" is the key. (An exception to the continuous blazing policy occurs in ROS primitive areas where blazing is not generally allowed.)

Painted blazes are often more vandal resistant than nail-on blazes, but may require more frequent maintenance. Edges and corners should be crisp and sharp. If paint is used, dripping paint, blotches, and over-sized blazes should be avoided. On rough barked trees, the tree will first need to be smoothed using a paint scraper, wire brush, or draw knife. Once the bark is smoothed, there are a number of successful paint-blazing techniques. Some trail maintainers paint free hand—using a 2" brush. Others use a sized stencil and apply the paint with a brush, sponge, dauber, etc. A high quality, glossy, exterior acrylic paint such as Sherman Williams Metalatex or Nelson Boundary Paint should be used for long durability. Spray paint is discouraged as it is more expensive and does not last as long. Neatness counts.



Vegetation should be pruned from in front of the blazes to ensure visibility in all seasons. If nail-on blazes are preferred, the NPS has a limited ability to provide them to non-federal trail managers. If affixing nail-on blazes to trees, only aluminum nails should be used. On private lands, landowner's should be contacted for preference.

North Country NST Blaze Standards

Public agencies and private organizations which manage trails incorporated into the North Country NST route have established various methods of marking trails. Their blazes and other markings are a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. To achieve as much consistency as possible the following standards are preferred:

1. Both paint and nail-on type blazes should be 2"× 6" vertical rectangles.

The 2"× 6" rectangular shape is large enough to be seen easily without being visually obtrusive and is the most universally accepted style of trail blazing. The 4" × 7" diamonds used in some areas are acceptable, but not preferred, and should be phased out whenever possible. To facilitate this movement, the NPS can supply (limited) plastic or aluminum blazes with color (as shown in item 2 below) to non-Federal partners choosing to use nail-on blazes (see Appendix 3 for a true-to-size blaze).

2. Throughout the trail, the color of choice is medium blue. The ideal blue color is available in a long lasting paint, specially formulated to last on trees (Nelson Paint Company, P.O. Box 2040, Kingsford, MI 49802; 906-774-5566). The paint is Nelson's Boundary Marking Paint, blue brush-on type *(Pantone 308)*. Nelson can also supply white boundary paint. Nelson paint can also be obtained from Forestry Suppliers, Ben Meadows, and other forestry supply sources. One current exception to the blue color is on the Manistee National Forest (MI) where grey/white blazes are required. Hopefully this can be changed in future forest plan revisions.

In New York, the North Country NST follows the Finger Lakes Trail for approximately 350 miles. The Finger Lakes Trail is blazed with white paint. Therefore where the two trails coincide, the color of choice is white. Eventually as the North Country NST nears completion, it may be desirable to mark the Finger Lakes/North Country Trail with both colors.

3. In non-forested areas, blazes should be placed on wooden or Carsonite posts 4 to 5 feet above the ground. Round posts are acceptable for blazes only. Treated 4" × 4" posts or Carsonite posts are required if emblems or other signs/decals are to be attached.

4. Spur trails should be distinguished by white paint (except along the Finger Lakes/North Country Trail where they will be painted the blue color shown in item 2).

H. Directional Change Indicators

These are necessary in places that require extra hiker alertness (e.g., important turns, junctions with other trails, and other confusing locations). They should be used sparingly so that they do not become meaningless or visually obtrusive. They are unnecessary at gradual turns and well-defined trail locations such as switchbacks. A reassurance marker should be placed so that it can be seen from the direction indicator. Signing for hikers coming from either direction should be done.

North Country NST Direction Indicators

Double blazes are the turn indicator of choice for the North Country NST. Again, because of the great diversity of this trail, flexibility in the use of directional markers is allowed. Several options and combinations of one or more of the options are acceptable. Directional markers are shown below in order of preference.

1. Along the trail where major turns are encountered, the normal way to indicate them will be through the use of two blazes—one placed 2 inches above the other and offset in the direction of the turn. Arrows are a less preferred option.

2. At trail junctions and where the trail jogs for a short distance down a road, a double blaze is preferred, but an arrow is acceptable. At all turns, but particularly at trail junctions when turning along a road, a single reassurance marker should be visible from the direction indicator.

3. If Carsonite posts are used, the standard Carsonite arrow decal is acceptable (3" × 3", cream on brown). However, the NPS will investigate the possibility of obtaining a blue arrow on brown background in order to carry out the overall blue color scheme. If a directional arrow is nailed to a tree or wooden post, the sign should be 4" × 4". The color of the arrow is the same color as the blazes being used along the trail, on a brown background.



I. Confirmation/Identification Signs (official trail emblems/logos)



On certified sections of the trail, the 3 1/2" trail logo should be placed at all road crossings (even drivable woods roads), intersections with other trails, and periodically along the trail.

Generally they should be about ½-mile apart, but frequency should increase in areas where there are numerous roads and intersections. These markers are made of plastic or aluminum for nailing to trees posts. They are also available in Carsonite decal format. In Carsonite format, they should be used in conjunction with mileposts—if mileposts are used—and the Carsonite usage strip decal (shown in item E) at access points and road crossings. Confirmation markers will be supplied by the NPS to all non-federal trail managers.

The larger 9" emblem is typically used at trailheads, major roads, and other locations where more visibility is desired.

J. Interpretation Signs

All interpretation should be done to quality standards which complement and enhance the prominence and identification of the trail. Simple identification signs (item J-1) are relatively inexpensive and can be placed as conditions warrant.

Interpretive Signs (item J-2) and wayside exhibits (item J-3) represent a major investment in time and money and should not be installed without a coordinated, inter-segment interpretive plan—which may involve the formation of an interpretive planning team. Complete details of the interpretive planning process can be found in the 1995 Handbook-*National Scenic and National Historic Trails-Wayside Exhibit Guidelines*, available through the North Country NST manager. This handbook also contains detailed information on the content and look of Wayside Exhibits. With long, linear sites such as the national trails, the importance of continuity in design is perhaps much greater than in a small, consolidated park. Using the directions found in the handbook reduces cost, saves time, and allows the public to easily identify the trail as part of a nationwide group of scenic and historic areas. Caution should be used to avoid over-interpretation. Interpretive waysides should follow the NPS wayside exhibit specifications, and the NPS should be involved in interpretive planning and exhibit design whenever items J-2 and J-3 are being considered.

It is often preferable to provide interpretive information at the trailhead kiosk or in brochures rather than on signs along the trail. The installation and maintenance of items J-2 and J-3 is expensive and these items are subject to vandalism. However, there are places where their placement along the trail is warranted.

1. Identification Signs: Identification signs label features along the trail. They are simple, routed wood, identification signs which allow the hiker to find their location on a map in relation to what they are seeing. It is also appropriate to use this type of sign to identify where the trail enters an area of public land if it is not otherwise marked by the agency. They are short and concise —normally only one or two words.



In most cases they consist of a name only, but may on occasion include a date. Generally, an identification sign is appropriate for all sites listed on destination signs.

Examples of appropriate signs are:

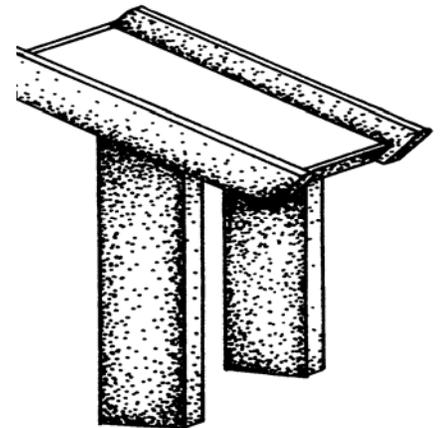
| | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Sunrise Lake | Big Iron River | Paul Bunyan State Forest |
| Parnell Esker | Bibler Spring | Red Pine planted 1955 |
| Woodtick CCC Camp 1942-44 | | |

These signs should be 1¼" blue letters on natural colored 4" wood boards. Paint color should match the blue Nelson boundary paint used for blazes (as close as possible). They can be preserved with clear, protective coating, if desired.

2. Interpretive Signs: These provide an interpretation option that is not as complex or expensive as wayside exhibits (J-3). They are smaller in size and do not have as complex a mounting system. However, they include graphics as well as descriptive text and, thus, are true interpretive signs—in contrast to item J-1 which merely labels features. They are intended to interest and educate the hiker and to interpret specific sites, fauna, or flora where a minor statement is

to be made—briefly showing details and giving descriptions of sites or objects without lengthy interruption of the visitor's trail tour. These signs should be high quality and constructed of durable material such as fiberglass embedment. The color should be blue or multi-colored on buff background. The size varies, but is typically from 15" × 18" to 24" × 36". If there is a need for recurring signs along the trail, these are a cost effective option—the first sign costs the most. For example, it may be desirable to interpret an esker or a kettle lake in a dozen or so locations.

3. Wayside Exhibits: These are the largest, most complex, and expensive of the interpretation options. Significant natural features or cultural resources may warrant the larger size and more complete interpretation which can be presented in this format. Like item J-2, these are intended to interest and educate the hiker and may be used to more fully explain historical events or sites, glacial landscapes or features, plant and animal communities, etc.—where a major statement regarding the subject can be made. Their intended use is to show details, action, etc., which are not clearly visible to the visitor upon casual observation. Major exhibits will occur much less frequently than either J-1 or J-2 for a number of reasons. They are expensive to develop and maintain and, if used too frequently, can take away from the character of the trail. (In addition to the graphic above, see Appendix 1 —mounting examples from the NPS Wayside Exhibit guidelines for National Scenic and Historic Trails, and a sheet from a supplier such as GS Images showing typical mounts for both J-2 and J-3).



K. "Crossing Private Land" Signs

The North Country NST crosses private lands in many locations. At the current time, the NPS does not have authority to purchase lands or easements for the trail. Other agencies are acquiring limited amounts of land and a few permanent easements are being donated. Until such time as acquisition authority is available, trail passage is at the mercy of the landowner and is dependent upon their cooperation. Therefore, efforts to foster and collectively maintain good-will must be practiced. One way to assist in this effort is to educate hikers about proper conduct when crossing private lands and to notify them when they are entering private property. This sign is intended to serve that purpose and must be located accurately.

The top portion of the sign should read, "PRIVATE LAND, USE OF THIS LAND IS A PRIVILEGE AND NOT YOUR RIGHT. STAY ON TRAIL."



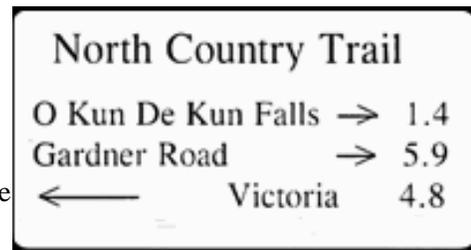
The lower part of the sign may contain smaller text such as the following: "The North Country NST depends on the cooperation of many private landowners. Please respect the land you travel through. Foot travel only is permitted. Camping, fires, hunting, and straying from the trail is prohibited. Enforced by the County Sheriff." This sign is yellow with brown lettering.

L. You-Are-Here Signs

These map signs are optional. They may supplement maps at trailhead kiosks and other key locations, such as at trail intersections, along the route. You-Are-Here signs are most likely found in state parks or other places that have a highly developed, complex, or confusing trail network. The other indicated methods to mark and identify the trail make You-Are-Here signs generally unnecessary. On the North Country NST, they are the exception rather than the norm.

M. Destination Signs

Destination signs show direction and distances to various spots along the trail. They are an important source of information both for long distance hikers and day hikers, and can serve to increase the use on under-used sections of the trail. If someone knows that there is a waterfall, lake, or other attraction down the trail,



they may be tempted to hike to it and thus become intrigued with the trail idea. Destination signs supplement the identification signs shown in paragraph J-1. They are optional but desirable. These signs will have blue letters on natural wood-color background.

The trail name will be 2" letters and the destination names will be 1" letters. Appropriate places for these signs are: trailheads, major roads, shelters, trail junctions, and spur trail junctions (to indicate distance to water or shelter). They may contain the following information:

1. The name of the trail,
2. Significant destinations such as rivers, road crossings, shelters, campsites, waterfalls, etc. along the trail,
3. The direction to these destinations indicated by arrows (arrows may not be needed, depending on sign placement—for instance if a sign is placed on each side of a road), and
4. The distance to the destinations in miles and tenths.

N. Boundary Marker Signs

In those locations where a corridor or easement has been acquired, these signs are used to permanently mark the trail corridor boundary. They are not necessary where the trail passes through large areas of public lands. White Carsonite type posts with blue decals and white lettering should be used. One side of the post should say "Private Land Behind This Sign"—similar to Carsonite decal PL-260, except for coloring. The other side should say "Property Boundary, National Scenic Trail Corridor Behind This Sign"—similar to Carsonite decal SP-401, except for coloring. Currently, off-the-shelf decals with the coloring and wording specified above are not available. Therefore, illustrations are not included. The National Park Service will work with a supplier to develop these decals when the first request for their use is made. Requests for these decals can be made to the North Country NST manager.

O. Adopter Signs

While these signs are optional, it is often appropriate to identify the volunteer(s) responsible for the maintenance of a particular segment of the trail and recognize their efforts. Trail adopters typically are assigned a segment of trail between two identifiable points—such as road crossings. Adopter signs will normally be affixed to the post which holds the Road Crossing Signs (item F). A variety of formats, including discs that recognize the efforts of a group (such as the North Country Trail Association, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference, the Buckeye Trail Association, etc.) or a small strip or sign recognizing the efforts of an individual are acceptable. If used, the coloring should be blue lettering on a white background.

P. Connector Signs

Certified sections of the trail are marked to the standards shown earlier in this chapter. Other temporary segments of the route which currently follow roads or other types of trail which are uncertifiable are generally not marked. To further the goal of marking the entire trail for public use, connector signs have been developed. These decals are shown in Appendix 3. The emblem shown at the top of the decal is also available in plastic, nail-up format.

The North Country Trail Association has developed a policy and explanation of the end-to-end marking concept. See Appendix 3.

Figure 4. NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL SIGN SUMMARY

| Sign Type | Material | Background Color | Letters | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|--|
| | | | Color | Size |
| Highway Information Signs | Aluminum or HDP | Brown | White | MUTCD-varies |
| Warning Signs | Aluminum or metal | Yellow | Black | MUTCD-varies |
| Entrance Signs | Aluminum or HDP | Brown | White | MUTCD-varies |
| Trailhead Kiosk | Wood | Brown | NA | NA |
| Regulatory (Usage) Signs | Decal, Alum., Plastic | Brown | White | varies |
| Blazes | Paint, Alum., Plastic | Medium Blue | NA | NA |
| Trail Emblems | Aluminum, Plastic | NA | NA | NA |
| Interpretation #1 | Wood | Natural Wood | Med. Blue | 1¼ inch |
| Interpretation #2 and #3 | Fiberglass Embedded | Buff | Multi-color | varies |
| Crossing Private Land | Plastic, Aluminum | Yellow | Brown | NA |
| Destination Signs | Wood | Natural Wood | Med. Blue | Trail Name-2 inches Destinations-1 inch |
| Boundary Markers | White Carsonite® Post | Medium Blue | White | NA |
| Adopter Signs | Decal, Plastic, Aluminum | White | Med. Blue | NA |
| *Connector Signs* | *Decal* | *Brown* | *White* | *Varies* |

HDP = High Density Plywood

MUTCD = Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices

NA = Not Applicable

Sign Maintenance

Sign maintenance is critical to the operation of a quality trail system. Well maintained signs that are repaired promptly convey a sense of pride and reduce further vandalism. Signs are a highly visible representation of the quality of the trail. Their maintenance or lack of maintenance leaves the visitor with a positive or negative impression about the trail. Signs convey many kinds of information and it is critical that they be in good shape. Special attention should be given to those that are damaged from shooting and other factors, those that are faded or brittle from long exposure, and those that are simply missing. All signs that are damaged or weathered so they no longer convey a good impression or serve the intended purpose should be repaired or replaced. Periodic painting and other maintenance is a necessity and will prolong the life of a sign.

Priorities for sign maintenance are:

1. Signs required for user safety,
2. User restrictions and advisory signs,
3. Destination and identification signs, blazes, and trail logos, and
4. Informative and interpretive signs.