# Chapter Nine

## Tools in the Toolbox: Communicating with the Public

If Not You, Who?

The foundation of this book is the effective application of the 4Es; and the basic premise of the second "E," Education, is that educated riders are responsible riders. Most agencies don't have the personnel or funding to have staff in the field when the riders are recreating, but it is essential that management communicate with the riders and that the riders understand that communication. If management team members don't effectively tell the public where they should be riding and how they should be acting, the team can't be disappointed when riders go where the team doesn't want them to go and do what the team doesn't want them to do.

Communication can occur through non-personal media, including signing, trail maps, websites, and social media. It can also occur through personal contact, including through agency staff, contracted site hosts, or volunteer trail ambassador programs.

### Signing

Signing gives the rider key information about the site, rules, orientation, education, and safety. By clearly conveying these messages, management can better control and direct the use, maximize rider safety, and minimize agency risk. But signing does more than just convey a message, it conveys an image and an expectation: this site is professionally managed. Visitors will respond to that image with increased respect and compliance.

These signs are getting illegible; the lower ones look like an afterthought. What image are you sending to the public when using these signs? How is the public supposed to obey the signing?

Here are some key points on signing:

- Have a sign plan. This ensures consistency with sizes, shapes, colors, messages, placement, and decal application protocols.
- Signing must be clear, concise, and effective. Follow the Keep It Simple (KIS) principle.
- Trails are like miniature roads and should be signed in the same manner as roads.
- Ensure that signing on the ground agrees with the information on the map or other handouts and media (website, downloadable maps, downloadable GPS data, etc.).
- When first entering a trailhead, signing will give visitors their first impression of the site, its management, and its maintenance. Make it a good and lasting impression.
- Provide the information that is essential for the rider to know.
- During project development, the importance of signing is often overlooked and its cost is often underestimated. Signing costs can be significant and need to be factored into the project budget to ensure quality signs and signing.

#### Tip, Trick or Trap?

**Tip:** Entrance management components

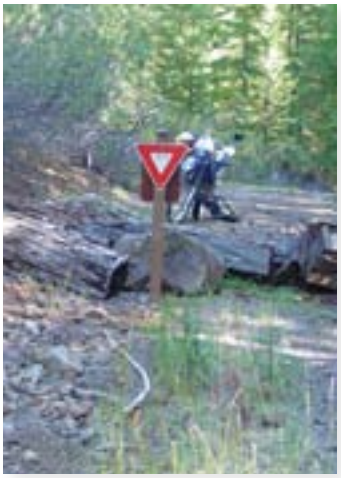
- Trail marker
- Travel management sign
- Vehicle width limiter
- Difficulty filter (if necessary)
- Closure or restriction sign (if necessary)

A sign plan can be very detailed and provide site-specific data on sign location, sign type, and message. Or it can be a programmatic sign plan which identifies typical signing scenarios for a project area and provides guidance on what signs would be appropriate in each of those scenarios. This provides consistency by ensuring that similar scenarios have similar signing. In each

scenario, the plan discusses the signs that are needed and their function. It provides guidance on the sign shapes, sizes, colors, messages, letter sizes, reflectivity, materials, decal placement protocols, and sign installation protocols.

Other benefits of a sign plan include:

- Identifies a sign theme that is consistent with the architectural theme and landscape setting for the project site.
- Helps ensure that the proper sign types are used in a given scenario.
- Minimizes sign clutter and maximizes sign efficiency.
- Provides all personnel with the same vision.
- Allows managers to budget for sign needs according to the vision.
- Allows volunteers to install and maintain the signs according to the vision.
- Over time, management and personnel will change, and a sign plan will maintain continuity and consistency through these changes.



Here, a low-volume spur road has been blocked where it continues on a single-track conversion. The motorcycle is parked in what is now a dead-end road with no cross traffic. There is nothing to Yield to, so why have a Yield sign?

There are eight key elements in effective signing (need, simplicity, clarity, quality, consistency, placement, monitoring, and maintenance) and having a plan helps address all of them.



These signs are simple and easy to read.


These signs have too much information and the important information like trail number and direction are not at the top where they should be. Agency and funding decals, if needed, should be at the bottom of the marker. Riders will not stop long enough to read or comprehend this data.

1. Need

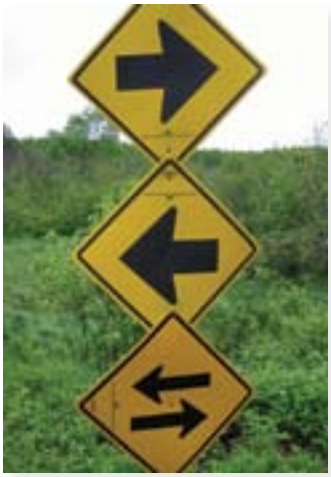
Determine the reason for a sign or if a sign is necessary.

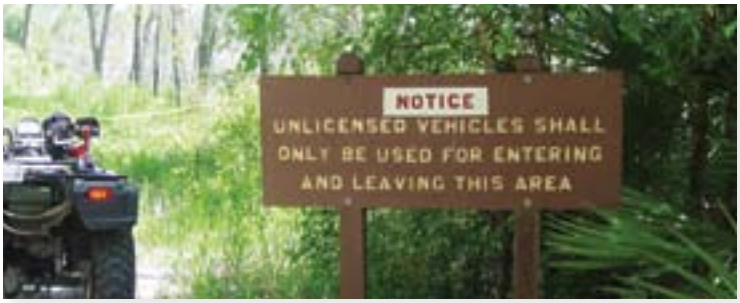
- Are there other options instead of signs? Can the hazard be eliminated or mitigated? Can the trail be realigned or relocated to eliminate the hazard? It's easier to put up a sign than to physically correct the problem, but this may not be the best long-term solution.
- If a sign is needed, choose the appropriate sign from the sign plan.

Having a plan helps avoid sign clutter like this. Though the information may be important, no rider is going to stop to read this barrage of signage. All of this could be put on one well-designed large sign.

## Tip, Trick or Trap?

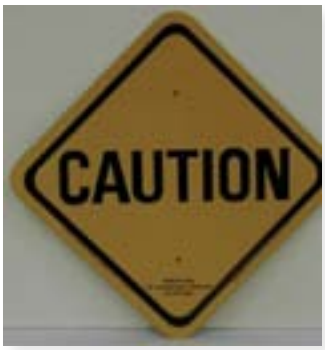
**Tip:** More signs do not equal more effectiveness

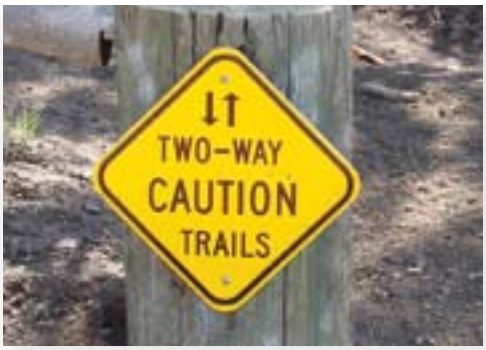





What do these signs mean? Riders cannot be compliant if they are confused by the message.

2. Simplicity
- Keep it simple and avoid clutter.
- The public spends very little time reading signs, so make them count.
- Use enough signs, but avoid over-signing.

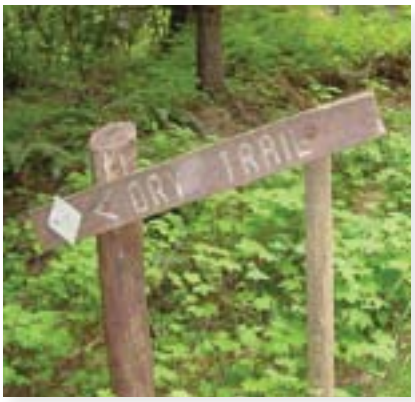





The sign at left is too simple. Caution of what? The sign at right explains what the Caution is.

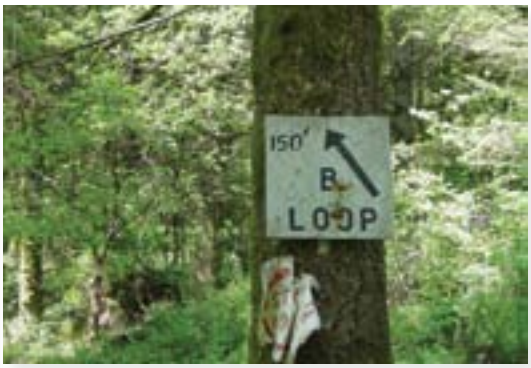
3. Clarity
- Use clear, concise messages.
- Will the rider understand the intent of the sign?
- Whenever possible, use symbols rather than words.

4. Quality
- Use durable materials that are vandal-resistant.
- Make sure the sign is taped to protect it from UV light or snow shear.
- Use professional letters and templates.
- Make the sign messages appropriate and professional.
- Check, re-check, then check again for correct spelling.
- The sign and the installation should be neat, legible, straight, and professional looking.
- The public respects quality, but quality does not necessarily equate to expensive.



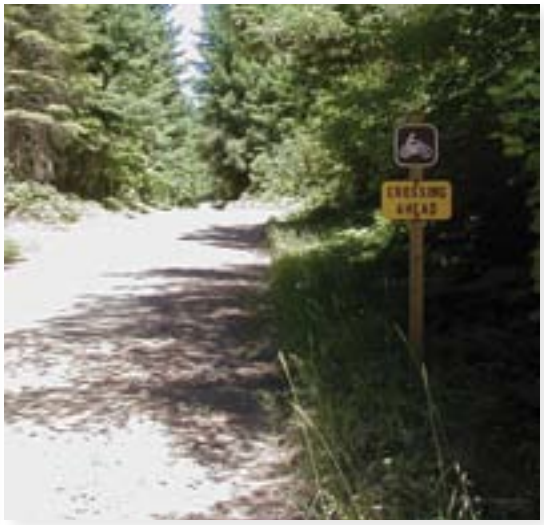
While any sign may be better than no sign, what message is being given to the riders with this poor quality sign installation?

Why did management accept and pay for these poor quality signs? People respect quality. If management doesn't care, why should the riders care?




These signs may be inexpensive, but they do not meet size, shape, color, or mounting standards. The paper stop sign is illegible. All of this only increases tort claim risk and decreases agency image.


The better image? The home-made sign on the left was definitely inexpensive, but the sign on the right is far more professional and effective.



Both of these motorcycle crossing warning signs are on the same trail system. Neither meet size, shape, color, mounting, or reflectivity guidelines. This, plus the lack of consistency, increases risk.

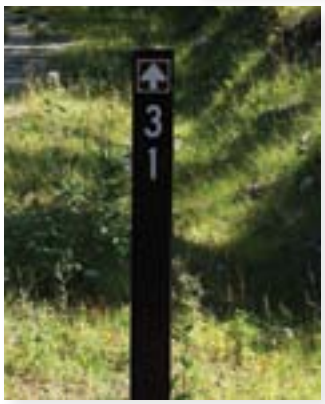
5. Consistency
- Do all of the signs meet shape, color, reflectivity, and message standards?
- Are similar hazards and situations signed identically?
- Is the signing consistent with that of other OHV trail systems in your area, state, or province?

6. Placement
This is perhaps the most critical and abused element. Most OHV trail signs are viewed from a moving vehicle, so signs need to be sized and placed where they are readily visible.

Install signs where the riders would expect to see them (generally on the right-hand shoulder of the trail, not up in a tree). This is where drivers and riders have been programmed to look for them. Occasionally, due to alignment or vegetation, a sign may be more visible if placed on the left side of the road or trail. Riders' eyes constantly scan the trail to pick the best line, but they aren't scanning trees and bushes looking for signs, so place the signs where the riders' scan will pick them up.
- Avoid placing signs in shadows or where vegetation may obscure them.
- Place the sign enough in advance of the hazard to allow sufficient time for the rider to see it, read it, comprehend it, and react to it. This is called the Perceive, Identify, Emotion, Volition (PIEV) time. The minimum sight distance for a warning sign should be 175 feet.
- The intent is to have professional looking signs, so all signs and posts should be as level or perpendicular as possible.
- When signing, assume that the rider is a beginner, unfamiliar with the trail, and there is poor light and visibility.

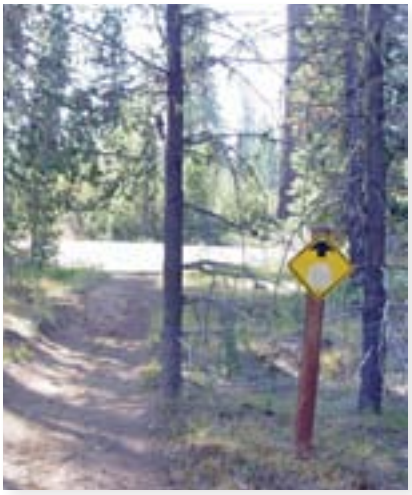
This trail is approaching a paved county road, but the Yield sign was placed behind a rock fence support.

This reassurance arrow stuck up in a tree is not visible nor effective.



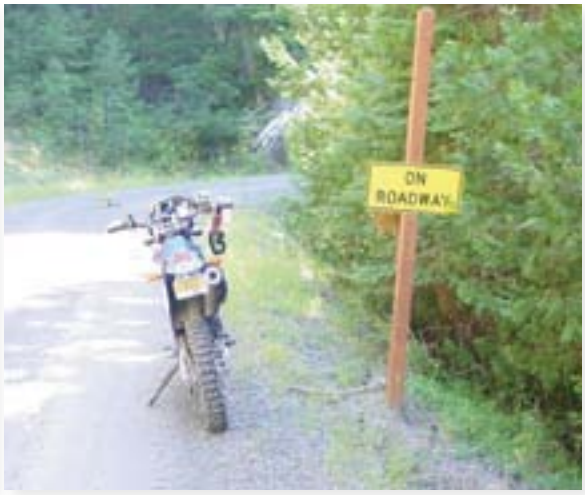

Even in poor light, this well-placed reassurance marker is clearly visible.

Effective signing is critical with one-way trails. This Wrong Way sign is poorly placed and is barely visible from the trail junction.



The sun has faded this Stop Ahead symbol to the point where it no longer meets color or retroreflectivity standards. In addition, the Stop sign is missing entirely.

Bullets beget bullets. Regular monitoring is essential to maintaining quality and effective signing.



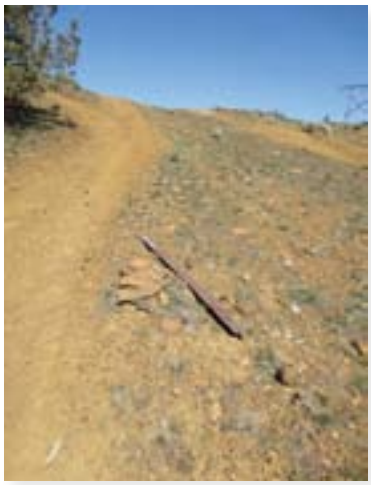

On a mixed use road, it is essential that the public be warned of the mixed traffic. Someone has removed the OHV symbol and it needs to be replaced in a timely manner.

7. Monitoring

- Monitor the condition of the signs and supports on a regular basis.
- Check color, reflectivity, placement, and overall effectiveness of the sign.
- Review the signing under a variety of light and weather conditions.
- Use an outsider or someone unfamiliar with your trails and signs to objectively judge the effectiveness of the signing.
- Don't be afraid to take down signs. More signs are needed early in a new program to educate the public, but may not be needed in three to five years.
- An annual evaluation is suggested. Evaluate the following:
  - Are signs visible?
  - Are signs missing?
  - Are the existing signs in good condition?
  - Are the signs in compliance with the current standards?
  - Are any signs no longer necessary or appropriate?
  - Are messages appropriate or accurate?
  - Are new signs compatible with existing installations?
  - Based on accident reports or near misses, are engineering studies required to determine additional signage to alleviate a safety concern?
  - Have signs been evaluated at night to determine their overall effectiveness and retroreflectivity?

8. Maintenance

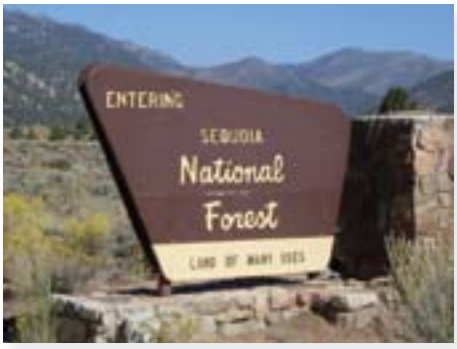
- Repair or replace signs as needed to maintain quality appearance and function.
- Keep vegetation pruned back so the signs are visible.
- Bullet holes invite more bullet holes.
- Warning and regulatory signs must be in-place and legible.



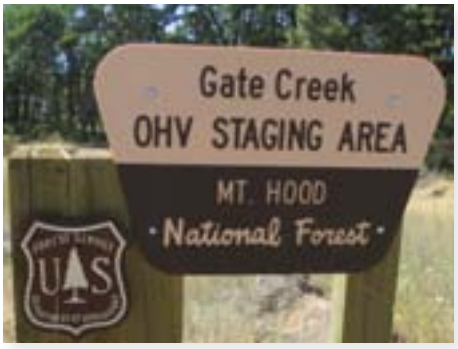
The reassurance marker lying on the ground is almost useless.

The forest is a dynamic environment. Inspection and maintenance personnel must be conscious of changes that can alter the effectiveness of the signing.

**Types of Signs.** When signing, it is important to use the right type of sign in the right situation.

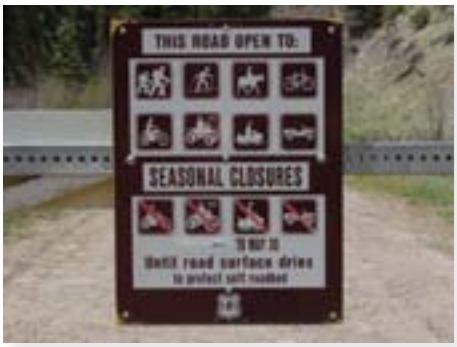


Administrative

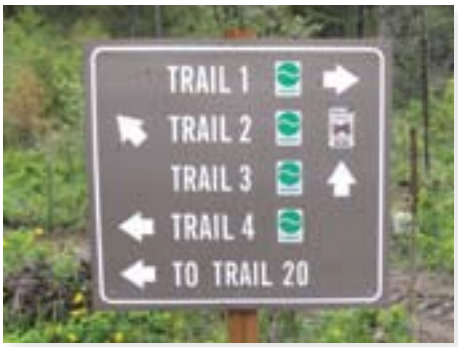


Recreation Site

Visitor Information

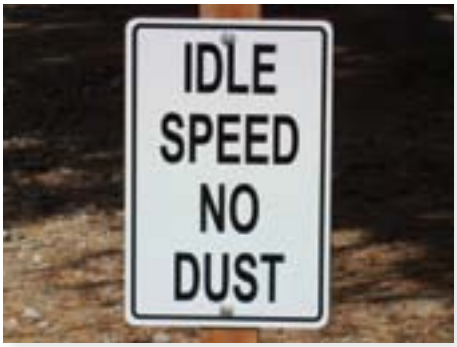


Travel Management

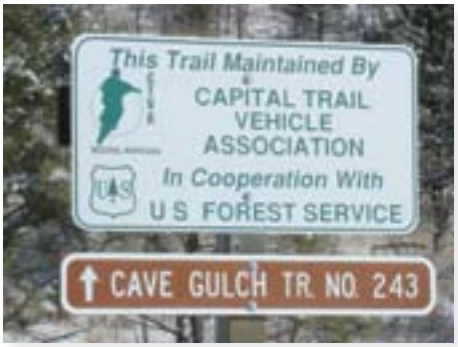


Trail


Warning



Regulatory



Cooperator

Program Area

Administrative signs generally identify who has jurisdiction of the site. Examples include Federal, State, Provincial, County, City, and Private property.

Recreation site signs identify the name of the site. Examples include trailhead, staging area, campground, and OHV park.

Visitor information signs relay rules, etiquette, information, education, and interpretation. Examples include: kiosks, map boards, and Required to Ride signs.

Travel management signs identify who can or can't use the route or area and any restrictions on use. Examples include: trail users allowed on routes, trail users restricted from routes, and seasons or dates trails are open and closed.

Trail signs include: trail junction markers, reassurance markers, destination (guide) signs, points of interest signs, and information signs (Use It, but Don't Abuse It; Stay on Trail or Stay Home; Please Stay on the Trail, the Future of This Trail Depends on You).

Warning signs warn of a potential hazard or unusual condition. They are diamond-shaped with reflective black on yellow or black on orange. Examples include: Intersection Ahead, Gate Ahead, Stop Ahead, and Yield Ahead.

Regulatory signs inform the users of traffic laws or regulations. Except for stop and yield signs, they are rectangular-shaped with reflective black on white. Examples include: Trail or Area Closed, Trail or Area Restricted, Stop, Yield, One Way, and Do Not Enter.

Cooperator signs recognize trail stewards, key volunteer groups, or other partners.

Program Area signs include open area boundary signs, OHV park boundary signs, and other boundary signs.

**Sign Colors.** As per the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and EM7100-15, signs should conform to the following standard colors.

**Red** is used only as a background color for Stop signs, Do Not Enter, and Wrong Way signs. Red is used as a legend color for Yield signs, parking prohibition signs, and the circular outline and diagonal bar prohibitory symbol.

**Black** is used as the background color on horizontal arrow One Way signs. Black is used as a message color on white, yellow, and orange signs.

**White** is used as the background color for most regulatory signs, except Stop signs. White is used for the legend and border on brown, green, blue, black, and red signs.

**Orange** is used as a background color for construction and maintenance signs.

**Yellow** is used as a background color for most warning signs unless orange is specified.

**Brown** is used as a background color for guide, information, and recreation signs.

**Green** is used as a background color for state and federal highway guide signs, milepost markers, and as a legend color with white background for permissive parking regulation signs.

**Blue** is used as a background color for information signs and related motorist services on state and federal highways.

**Sign Shapes.** As per the MUTCD and EM7100-15, signs for motorized trails should conform to the following standard shapes.

## Tip, Trick or Trap?

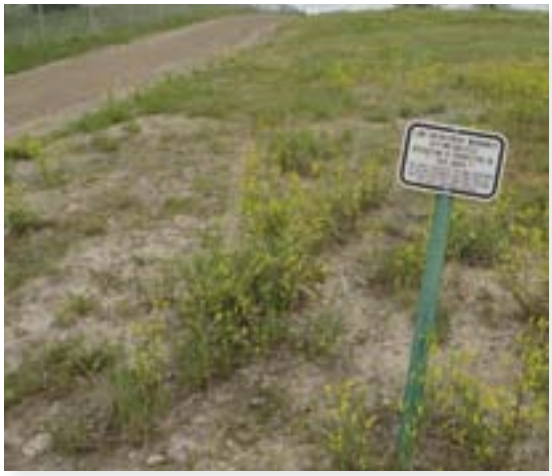
**Trap:** More signs do not equal less risk

Keep signing simple and minimal. Warning signs especially should be used very judiciously. Tort claims have been lost because one hazard was signed, but another hazard wasn't. There can be less risk by adding "ride at your own risk" verbiage to the map, kiosk, and web messages than by putting up warning signs.

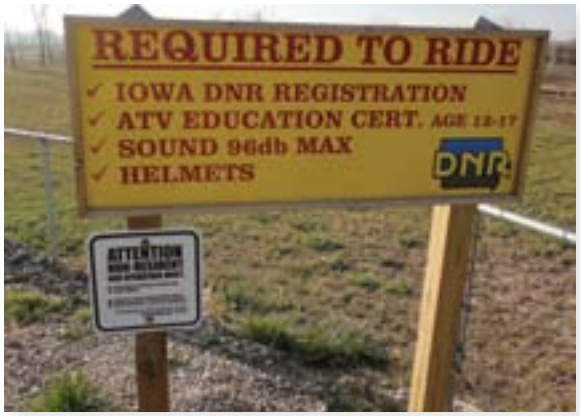
| Image | Shape | Sign | Image | Shape | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Octagon | Stop |  | Rounded pentagon | County route |
|  | Equilateral triangle | Yield |  | Crossbuck | Highway-rail grade crossing |
|  | Circle | Highway-rail grade crossing (advance warning) |  | Diamond | Warning series |
|  | Isosceles triangle | No Passing |  | Rectangle (and square) | Regulatory series<br>Guide series<br>Warning series<br>Recreation symbols |
|  | Pentagon | School advance warning |  | Trapezoid | Recreational and cultural interest area series<br>National forest route |

**Letter and Symbol Sizes**. For motorized trails, the minimum letter size is 2 inches using an ASA (American Standards Association) Series C font and the minimum symbol size is 12 inches. Consider the intent of the sign, rider speed, and viewing distance when determining appropriate letter sizes. A 2-inch letter is difficult to read from a moving vehicle or from any distance, but a 3-inch letter is quite legible.

**Sign Sizes.** The minimum size for warning and regulatory signs is 12 x 12 inches. Smaller signs should not be used unless the rationale is documented in the project file.



This regulatory sign prohibits OHV operation in this area. The letter size is too small and the sign is placed too far away from the trail to be legible. We can't get compliance if we don't effectively deliver the message.




Letter sizes are important since it doesn't serve you or your customers to have a sign that cannot be read. This sign is intended to be read from a moving vehicle. The Required to Ride sign is legible, but the Attention sign is not legible even from a stopped vehicle. The letter sizes should be bigger or this sign should go on a kiosk for stationary, close-up viewing.

The USDA Forest Service Sign and Poster Guidelines EM7100-15 is a recommended resource for roads and OHV trails. It contains a plethora of additional information on sign messages, abbreviations, number of lines per message, the use of arrows, letter size in relation to speed, sign substrates, etc.

### Tip, Trick or Trap?

**Trap:** Use the word "safe" as a descriptor of the trails, facilities, or experiences. Safe is a relative term, it can't be guaranteed, and lawyer will use it against you in court.

**Recommended Sign Guidance.** For safety, durability, and professional appearance, the following general sign guidelines are recommended:

- Use retroreflective backgrounds on signs so they appear to be the same shape and color by night as by day. Even if there is no night riding, search and rescue operations frequently occur at night.
- Put a border on the signs.
- Order signs with rounded corners and pre-drilled holes for attachment.
- Mount signs on posts or markers, not on trees.
- Only one warning or regulatory sign should be mounted per post.
- All signs with decals, letters, or numbers can be covered with clear plastic tape that wraps over the top of the sign. This helps prevent snow shear; protects the sign and decals from UV decay; and protects the sign from damage by weather, wildlife, or vandalism. This protective sheeting can triple the life of the sign or marker.

At the time of final design or construction, a Sign List should be developed that lists all the signs and markers needed on a particular segment of trail. Once the signs are installed, GPS coordinates can be added so the Sign List and can serve as a complete sign inventory as well as a maintenance tool. This list aids in the correct assembly and installation of the signs.

Signs up to 18 x 18 inches should be attached to posts with 5/16 x1¼ inches hex head lag bolts with washers. Larger signs should be attached with 3/8 x 1½ inches hex head lag bolts with washers. For all signs that are near roads, trailheads, staging areas, campgrounds, or other areas with public access, consider vandal-resistant hardware. To avoid damage to the sign face and decals, the holes for these screws need to be pre-drilled and care should be taken not to over-tighten the bolts or screws.

For quality aesthetics in most forest settings, it is preferred to have signs with brown backs since they blend with the landscape better and look more natural. This is an advantage of using brown polyplate as a sign substrate. In an urban or industrial setting like an OHV park or MX track, other background colors may be more appropriate.


**Things That Harm Signs.** When selecting sign materials, there are several environmental factors to consider.

**Wildlife.** Porcupines eat wood signs, so avoid using wood if these animals are prevalent. Deer and elk will use signposts to rub the velvet off their antlers. A 4 x 4 inch wood post can be rubbed to a toothpick in a few years. Fiberglass or metal may be a better alternative.

**Livestock.** Cows will scratch themselves by rubbing on signs and can easily break a sign or deface it. Consider using thicker materials and be sure to cover the signs with clear overlaminate tape to increase durability.

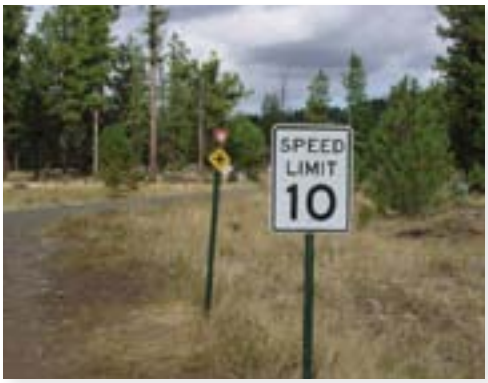
**Ultraviolet light.** The sun's UV rays will fade colors, damage adhesives so decals peel and multi-layer signs delaminate, and bleach the resins out of fiberglass so it fades and rots. When possible, order materials that are UV stabilized. Cover all signs and markers with clear overlaminate tape.

**Weather.** Rain will eventually saturate wooded laminate signs like plywood. Heavy hail can cause sign sheeting or decals to peel. Snow shear is a tremendous force that can also peel away the sheeting or decals. Extend the life of your signs by using clear overlaminate tape.

In areas that are prone to high winds or tornados, consider using thicker substrates and heavier bolts to attach signs to posts. Be sure that signposts and markers are thoroughly imbedded in the ground. This can be difficult in hardpan or rocky ground so drilling may be needed to obtain an adequate depth.

**Human exposure.** Graffiti, bullet holes, or breakage can be a common problem in some locations. Having a clear overlaminate sheeting will aid in the removal of graffiti. Regular inspection and maintenance are needed to address other issues.

**Common Mistakes.** There are several common mistakes that all management teams make when considering what signing to use on their trails. The photos below highlight the mistakes and give suggested solutions.




**Mistake:** Improper sign and placement, plus the top of sign is illegible.

A poster stapled on a tree is not an adequate warning sign and a sign like this increases agency risk. A proper warning sign should be installed on a post on the right side of the trail. The trail difficulty should be indicated at the beginning of the trail, not midway through it.

**Mistake:** Improper sign size and sign clutter.

At this trail and road junction, the important sign is the Yield sign, yet it is the smallest sign. The Intersection Warning sign should be placed in advanced of the junction. The Speed Limit sign should be put in a location removed from the intersection.

**Mistake:** Mixing sign types.

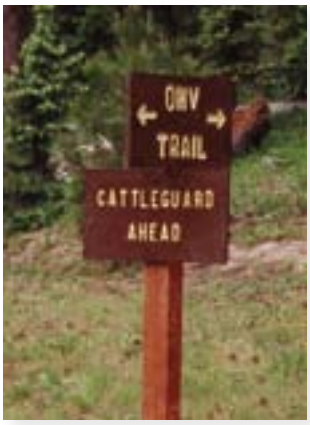
Yield is a regulatory sign, but 2-Way Traffic is a really a caution message that should be on a warning sign. The intent was good, but the sign is confusing. On a two-way trail, someone always has to yield to another rider. This Yield sign should be removed and replaced with a standard 2-Way Traffic sign.

**Mistake:** The agency logo at the top.

Don't be offended, but riders really don't care or need to know who owns the trail. If desired, agency decals should be placed at the bottom of the marker. Keep in mind that every decal adds to the sign installation and maintenance cost. Trail identifiers would be helpful.

**Mistake:** Improper sign, and the sign is illegible

In most cases, any sign is better than no sign, but can riders read this hand-stenciled sign as they go by? The letter color blends into the sign background. Having standard shapes, colors, and messages increases signing effectiveness and decreases agency risk.

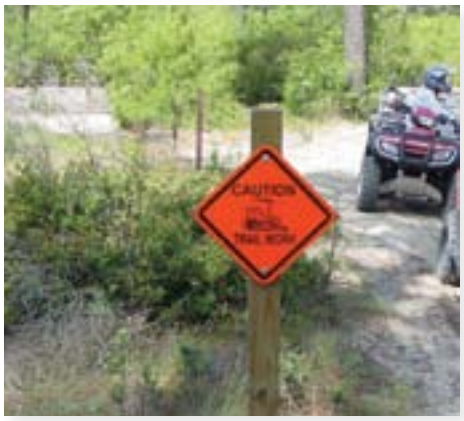



**Mistake:** Improper size, shape, color, letter size, and reflectivity

The routed wood OHV Trail sign may be appropriate in some settings, but they are expensive and not as durable as other substrates. The Cattle Guard Ahead is being used as a warning sign but it does not meet proper sign guidelines for warning signs. A proper sign should be mounted on its own post on the right side of the trail.


**Mistake:** Improper size and placement of regulatory sign.

If a regulatory sign is really needed, then it is an important sign and it shouldn't be a 3"x 3" decal stuck at the bottom of a string of other decals. A standard Stop sign should be installed on its own post. Given that this is a primitive sand road, do riders really need to stop or would a Yield sign be more appropriate?



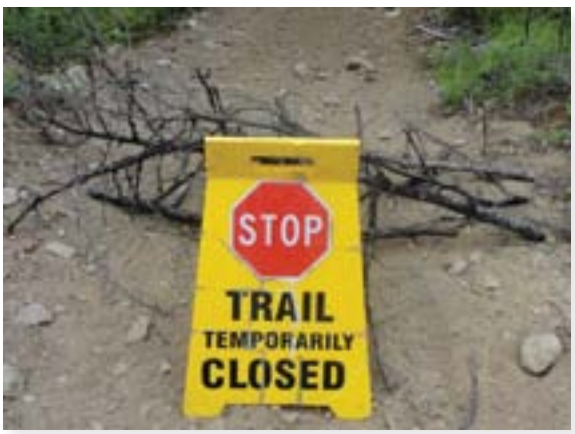
**Mistake:** Permanently mounted maintenance signs.

This is a good warning sign though it should be placed on the other side of the trail. The issue is that it is there all of the time. When riders see this sign, they will slow up and be cautious for a while, but if no activity is seen, they will roll the throttle back on and eventually ignore this sign altogether. A better sign would be a sandwich board that the maintenance crew temporarily places in the center of the trail segment being worked on. This is more work, but it's more effective.

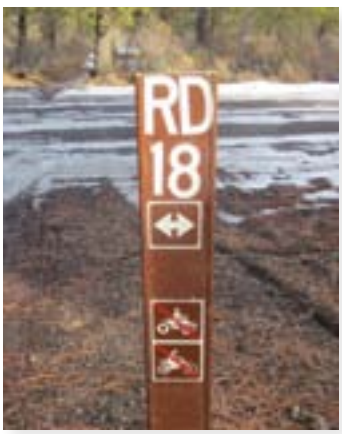
**Mistake:** Conflicting messages.

Riders can't be compliant if we aren't clear in our communication.

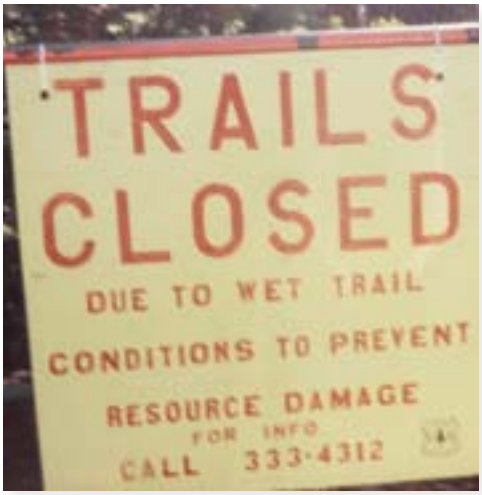
## Good ideas. There are also several good ideas for signing.




This sandwich board is easy to set up and it folds flat for easy transport. It is a good sign to use during reconstruction, maintenance, or if a trail needs to be temporarily closed for resource protection.

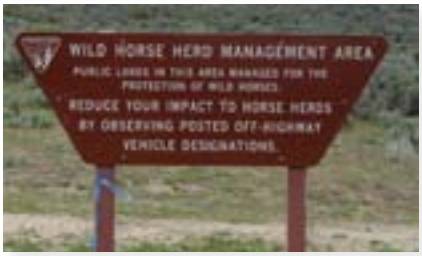



Signing trails and major road crossings can really help orient riders when they are staring at a map and wondering where they are. It can also help with search and rescue operations if they know a rider is near Trail X and Road 18.




Proactive management requires quick sign installations to inform riders and protect resources. A notice should also be posted on the trailhead kiosk and the trail website.


This sign alerting riders of hunting season is a great example of customer service. It could protect rider safety and it certainly gives riders a positive image of the managing agency.




People respect restrictions better when they understand the rationale behind them. People also like to understand the natural environment. This would be a good place to install a wild horse interpretive sign.

## Trail Maps

As in signing, trail maps provide information, orientation, education, and safety messages. Riders may read the map information around the campfire or on the way home, but when first arriving on site, riders will make a beeline to the map so they can plan their route and start riding. The primary function of the map is orientation. As such, there are three critical factors: 1) the information on the map must match the signing on the ground; 2) the base map data must be recent enough to agree with the database used in most GPS units; and 3) maps must be available by handout or in a map box.


If there isn't staff, a host, or a volunteer available to hand out maps and education material, a map box is the next best thing. Think of that box as a way to personally hand a map to the customer.

### Tip, Trick or Trap?

**Tip:** Trail junctions can often be congested with riders looking at maps or waiting for others in their group. This intersection ahead decal alerts riders that a junction is approaching so they have time to slow up and watch for traffic. NOTE: if there was a known hazard at the trail junction due to poor design or unusually high traffic volume, a 12"x 12" warning sign would be required. Notice how the even decal spacing increases the legibility of this marker. The Single Track No ATV decal is a good travel management reminder on this reassurance marker but a larger sign should be located at the trail entrance.

Though maps can easily be loaded onto mobile electronic devices, the paper map will never become obsolete because it can be wadded up and stuffed in a shirt or fanny pack; used when wet, muddy, or extremely dusty; and can survive a day of being bounced around on the trail.

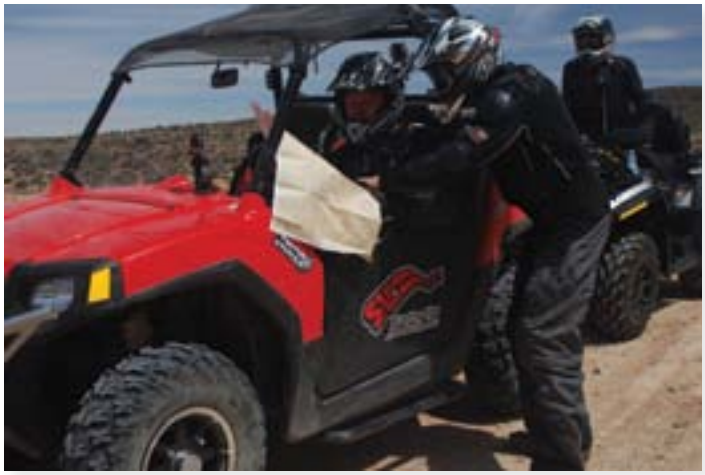
A good, user-friendly trail map should have as many of the following elements as possible.

- The larger the scale, the better. 1 inch = 1 mile is good, but a larger scale allows more information to be displayed on the map and gives the rider a better sense of distance.
- Township, range, and section lines or UTMs (Universal Transverse Mercator) aid in navigation and orientation and are helpful for search and rescue operations. Most riders are GPS savvy and prefer maps with UTMs.
- US National Grid coordinates (previously US Military Grid) can be used in a GPS or as coordinates along the edges of a map, similar to

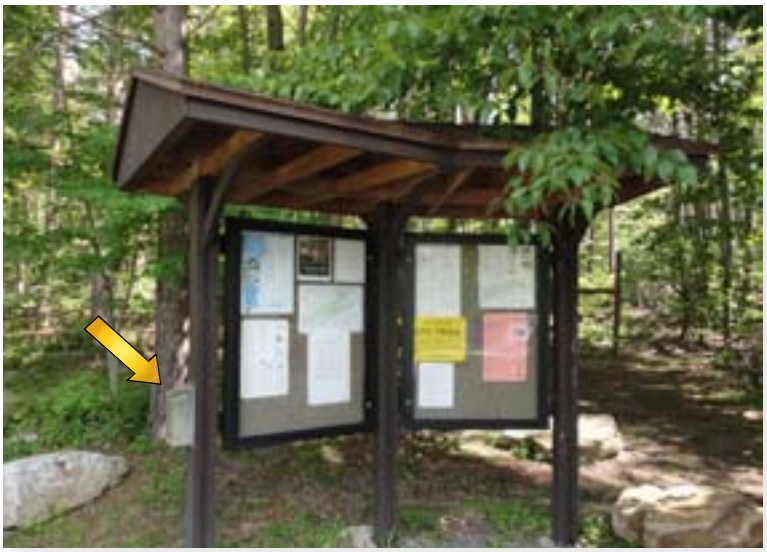
When the map shows the trail going to the left and the sign indicates the trail goes to the right, you have lost control of the riders. This can lead to concerns with rider safety and resource impacts not to mention arguments.

atlases so people with or without a GPS can find their location between the signs and the maps. Emergency response personnel can use the same coordinates in their system to easily find lost or injured recreationists.

- GPS coordinates for trailheads, campgrounds, shelters, or other key features also help riders orient and navigate.
- Topography contour lines or shaded relief. Riders tend to seek the trails with the most elevation change and will always go to the highest point on the trail system.
- The trails labeled by name or number with difficulty indicated by color or symbol and travel direction (one-way or two-way).
- Having the mileage between trail junctions is helpful in planning the day's ride and helps orient the riders as to the scale of the trail system.
- The allowable vehicle uses on each trail or all trails as well as allowed non-motorized uses. These can be shown with symbols on each trail, marked in the legend, or shown elsewhere on the map.
- All routes with indicators showing if they are open or closed to the designated uses. These aid in navigation and orientation. Access routes can be used when something goes wrong and riders need to find an alternate way back to the trailhead, or when there's a major breakdown and riders need to find the nearest vehicle access to retrieve a machine.



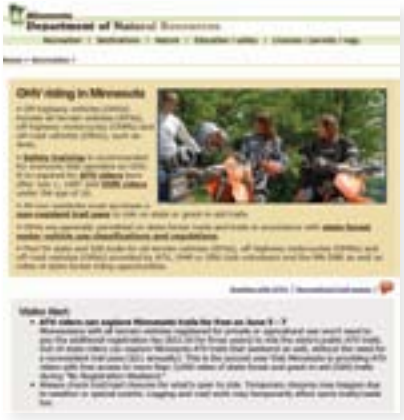
Where the heck are we? Why doesn't this agree with my GPS?

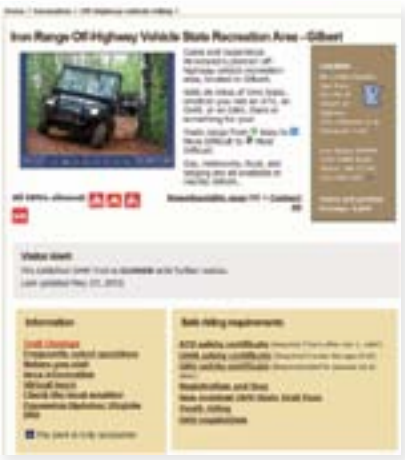


An empty map box is a lost opportunity for effective communication.

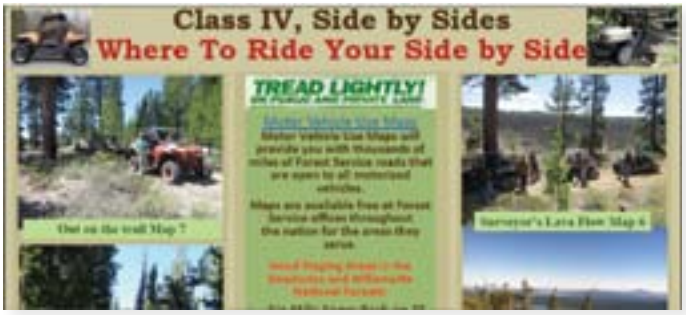
- Trailheads, campgrounds, shelters, viewpoints, play areas, interpretive sites, and other features or destinations identified.
- Key natural features labeled for orientation: mountains, lakes, major streams, etc.
- A good and complete legend.
- Access information from the nearest population center.
- A welcome section with brief information about the trail system.
- Emergency phone numbers, agency contact information, how to report a fire, websites, 24-hour hotlines, etc.
- Rules, restrictions, operator responsibilities, vehicle equipment requirements, seasonal closures, etc.
- Any fees to use the site.
- Hours of operation if day use only.
- Rider education, rider ethics, and safety information.
- Noxious weed information, important resource protection information for soils, plants, wildlife, fire, etc.
- Land ownership, wilderness areas, restricted areas, closed areas.
- A description of the key signs riders will encounter on the trail.
- A recreation opportunity guide (ROG). Some areas use ROGs to give the rider a brief description of what experience to expect on each trail, especially in relation to difficulty. What does a black diamond mean on this trail? The ROG will explain it.
- Camping and campfire information, group camping rules, firewood gathering rules, etc.

## Websites and Social Media

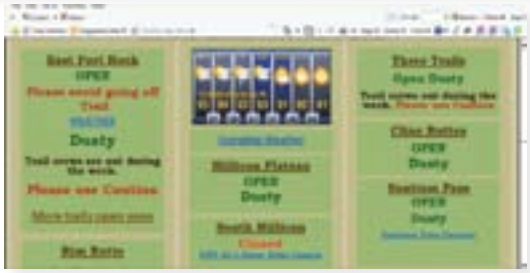




The phrase "Know Before You Go" has never been easier to achieve. Most riders get maps, directions, weather, and other information from websites before they leave to go riding. Certainly, the cyber information era can be a blessing to management if management chooses to use it effectively. A website can have rules and regulations, downloadable maps, fee information, equipment and licensing information, current conditions, a volunteer page, links to weather and fire conditions, etc. The list of possibilities is almost endless.




A good website will be simple and easy to navigate. The general public should be able to locate the information easily on the site with a few simple clicks. Long pages where the public needs to scroll several times in order the find additional information usually causes important information to be missed. A higher number of shorter pages with a good menu or menu page is better.

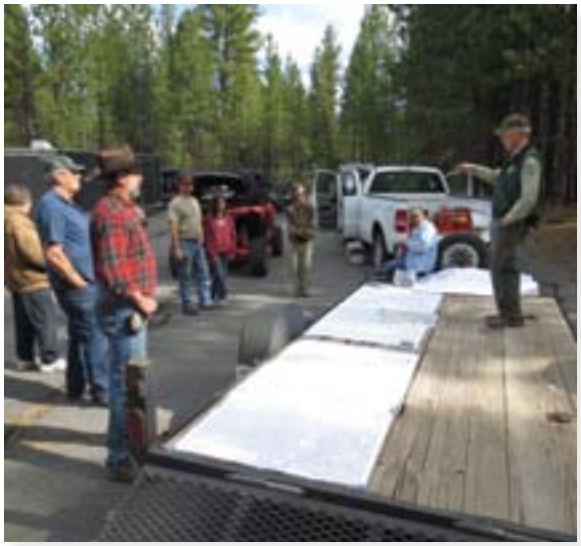


Many maps are now geo-coded. This means a map can be downloaded to a smartphone or similar device. Map apps with the ability to read these maps use the internal GPS of the smartphone to track the rider's location on the downloaded map as the trails. The website should have both the maps and a list or link to possible apps which will work with the geo-coding on the map.


Social media is the number one way to reach younger people. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can get important messages to younger riders and get them out to your trails.

## Agency Staff

Any manager's dream is to have the funding to have adequate staff who are conscientious, knowledgeable, professional, and customer service-oriented. However, as budgets tighten, that dream becomes less of a reality.



From the public's perspective, having personable agency staff on site provides:

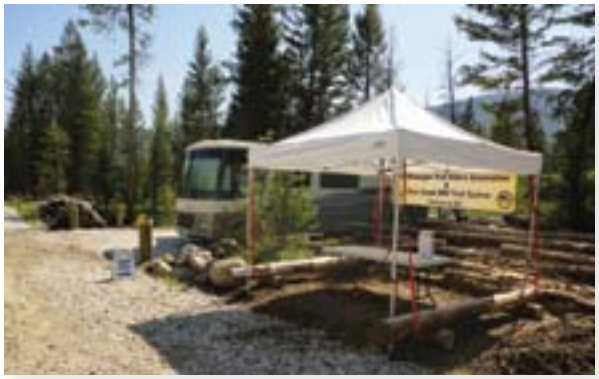
- A sense that the agency cares about them and their activity.
- Face-to-face communication personalizies the agency and can breach the sometimes daunting impersonal wall of bureaucracy.
- A sense of increased security.
- An understanding of agency challenges that can potentially lead to increased volunteerism.
- Visible evidence that the site is actively managed.

## Contracted Site Hosts

When there is inadequate agency staff, non-agency site hosts can help fill the gap and provide a valuable service. Site hosts must have the social skills to effectively handle a variety of situations and they must have a friendly customer-service attitude. Hosts must be trained and have dependable communication with management and law enforcement. Since hosts are more likely to be on-site when the riders are present, they can be especially beneficial on projects that include a change in rider ethics, rules, fees, and riding opportunities.

Other advantages can include:

- Increased "agency" visibility
- Increased rider education
- An increased sense of visitor security
- Increased compliance
- Decreased vandalism
- An increase and more effective collection of fees
- Increased public image and awareness of active management
- People prefer personal contacts over machines. Friendly customer service helps to provide for the riders' needs.



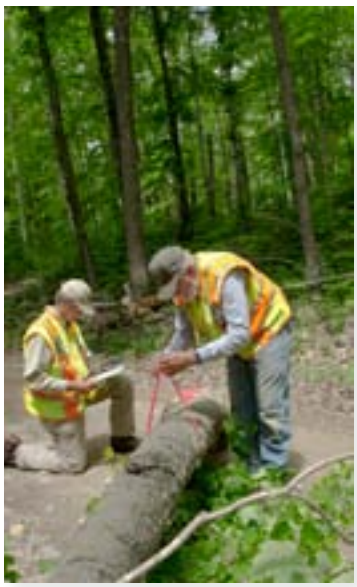
A neat professional looking host site and the key: a host with a smile

## Volunteer Trail Ambassadors and Rangers

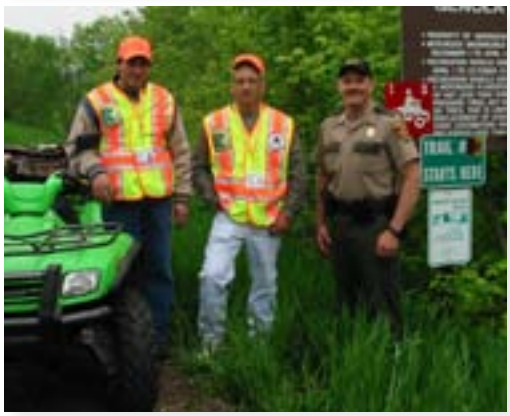
Except for fee collection, a volunteer trail ambassador program can have all of the same benefits of a site host. Ambassadors need to be able to ride, but like a host, the most important prerequisite is possessing good social skills. To be effective, a personal encounter must have a positive outcome, and that is determined by the skill and attitude of the ambassador (or host). Ambassadors must be trained and should have a probationary period of supervised encounters to ensure quality and positive outcomes.

Here are some considerations for trail ambassador programs:

- Ambassadors must have a designation, ride in pairs, wear PPE, have a check in and check out procedure, and have dependable communication with law enforcement or management.
- Ambassadors must recognize the line between education and enforcement. The role of an ambassador is strictly education. They do not do enforcement and usually do not collect fees.
- Sometimes personal ownership and commitment can lead to a vigilante attitude, which is neither positive nor productive. Management must weed out those people.
- Since ambassadors can roam the trails, they provide a wider agency presence that is outside of the trailhead.
- By riding the trails, they are providing monitoring and can report trees down, signs missing, off-trail use, erosion, invasive species, or other trail issues. This can be a huge value to management.



Volunteer Trail Ambassadors can perform many functions for the agency while out on the trail.



Trail Ambassadors provide peer to peer education, not enforcement.

- Since they are dressed like riders, they can apply effective peer pressure because riders will associate with and listen to other riders.
- Ambassadors can be trained to perform complimentary tech check inspections.
- Ambassadors can develop pride by being part of an elite group that provides an important function. Their positive attitude can stimulate volunteerism.
- Ambassadors can also serve as effective agency representatives at fairs, trade shows, sportsmen shows, professional OHV events, and other venues.

Volunteers can help staff educational booths at shows or events. They can also perform and educate peers regarding tech inspections, including sound measurement.

An effective OHV program communicates well with the public at all levels and ages.

## A Second Look...

**The Three Tools for Success**: Almost every chapter has linked back to the Three Tools for Success: Provide for the Riders' Needs, Design for Sustainability, and Develop an Effective O & M Program. This chapter is all about developing and implementing that third tool. Communication opens doors by fostering trust and understanding. It provides a crucial personal or non-personal link between management and the riders to transfer essential information and education. When a person's actual recreation experience doesn't match his expected experience, the result is frustration and emotion that gets termed and categorized as user conflict. Management can influence those expectations by effectively communicating with and educating the public, especially prior to their arrival at the trailhead.

## Need more? Learn more here...

*ATV Braking Study, Sign Recognition Analysis and Validation, Final Report*, Michigan Tech, Keweenaw Research Center, March 2014

*Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, May 2012, http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/

*Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service*, EM7100-15, USDA Forest Service, October 2013

*Central Oregon Combined OHV Operations (COHVOPS)*, http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/deschutes/recreation/ohv

Coalition of Recreational Trail Users/Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, http://www.findthetrails.com

## A Look Back...

Here are some of the elements discussed in this chapter:

- Educated riders are responsible riders. Communication provides that education.
- Non-personal communication includes signing, trail maps, and websites and social media
- Personal communication occurs through agency staff, contracted site hosts, and volunteer trail ambassadors and rangers
- If the management team members don't effectively tell the public where they should be riding or how they should be acting, the team can't be disappointed when riders go where they don't want them to go or do what they don't want them to do
- A sign plan helps to ensure consistent and effective signing while increasing rider safety and decreasing agency risk
- Eight key elements of signing: Need, Simplicity, Clarity, Quality, Consistency, Placement, Monitoring, and Maintenance
- Signing and mapping provide information, education, orientation, and safety messages.
- Three critical map factors:
  - The information on the map must match the signing on the ground.
  - The base map data must be recent enough to agree with the database used in most GPS units
  - Maps must be available for handout or in a map box
- Management should seize the opportunity to have current, complete, and accurate website data and links
- Agency staff can effectively deliver communication messages by being knowledgeable, conscientious, professional, and customer service-oriented
- Site hosts and trail ambassadors can be very valuable tools to augment agency staffing. They can increase agency visibility, education, compliance, and sense of public security.
- Site hosts and ambassadors must be trained, understand their roles, and have effective social skills to produce positive encounters under a variety of situations
- An effective OHV program communicates well with the public at all levels and ages