

INTERPRETIVE PLANNING - TOOL #4

Interpretive Media Design Guidelines

GUIDELINES APPLICABLE TO ALL MEDIA

Accessibility

- For specific guidelines on exhibit accessibility, see the [Forest Service Exhibit Accessibility Checklist](#), adapted from the Smithsonian Institute:
- The [Forest Service Electronic and Information Technology](#) accessibility website provides guidance for achieving Section 508 compliance.
- The [Forest Service National Accessibility Program](#) website has numerous links to accessibility guidelines, resources, agency policies and laws, and the 2013 Accessibility Guidebook on Outdoor Recreation and Trails.

Color and Contrast

Use contrasting colors for text and background for ease of reading. Use the following websites to check your colors for both print and electronic media.

- [Vischeck](#) (simulates color blindness)
- [Lighthouse for the Blind](#) (checks color contrast; also provides general design guidelines for both print and electronic media)
- [WebAIM](#) (Web Accessibility in Mind; checks color contrast for electronic media)
- The [University of Minnesota's Accessibility Checker](#) (has a variety of tools and links)

Corporate Image

Incorporate the forest name, Forest Service shield, and Forest Service motto – Caring for the Land and Serving People. Follow and design themes already established or planned for the forest through an interpretive plan or design narrative.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETIVE PANELS

(Note – many of these guidelines are applicable to brochures as well.)

Captions

Captions for graphics can be used to meet interpretive objectives and support the theme. Some visitors look only at graphics so the graphic so this should be a learning opportunity that stands on its own.

Fonts

Use a sans, slab, or simple serif typeface, upper and lower case (sentence case) font. Minimum point sizes vary with the font used, but in general should follow these guidelines, assuming a viewing distance of 3 feet:

- Titles: minimum ¾” ; suggested 1 ½” (72-200 point)
- Subtitles: minimum ½” ; suggested ¾” (40-48 point)
- Body Text: 3/8” (30-36 point)
- Captions: ¼” (21-24 point)

Layout/Design

In general, signs should contain 1/3 graphics, 1/3 text, and 1/3 blank space.

Margins

Margins on text should be flush on the left side and ragged on the right. Short sections of text (3 lines or less) can be ragged left. If you plan to frame your exhibit, allow for a minimum 1 ½ inch border around the layout.

Mounting Height

A mounting height of 24’ to 30’ with a 30 to 45 degree angle toward the viewers will be accessible to most visitors. The front edge height of low profile exhibits should be 32”.

Site Compatibility

Make sure the sign is compatible with the site, the Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classification as far as color, size, frame, etc. It should enhance the site, not detract from it.

Simplicity

The main body of text should be no more than two paragraphs of three or four short sentences. Keep text to no more than 150 words for a 24" x 36" panel or 200 words for a 36" x 48" panel. Captions may provide additional text, but should not clutter the layout or complicate the storylines.

Text

The text should be written with the "3-30-3" rule in mind. You have 3 seconds to hook the visitor, 30 seconds if they are hooked to share primary themes and storylines, and 3 minutes if they are very interested.

A sign should be designed and written so that it contains three levels of text with each level that ties to the main theme, thus providing all visitors with an interpretive opportunity regardless of how long they stay. For example, a short title at the top of a sign might be the only text some visitors read, so it is important the learning interpretive objectives for the site be met to some degree even at the 3-second timeframe.

Titles

The titles of a sign or brochure should hook the reader into investigating further, and give a hint at the primary interpretive theme. For example, "Bats in Peril" sets the stage for interpreting the threat of White-Nose Syndrome.

Subtitles should introduce each of the 2-3 storylines on the panel, and a concluding statement (or tagline) should provide the take home message for the viewer.

Bats in Peril

Bat-killing Fungus Threatens Populations

The Beauty of Bats

The poor bat - for centuries it has been portrayed as a blind, blood-sucking vampire or an ugly flying mouse. In truth, they have astonishing capabilities and are a vital part of our ecosystem.

- Some bats are essential pollinators for many plants.
- A single bat can eat up to 1,000 mosquitoes in an hour.
- Bats are not blind and most can see as well as humans. If a bat swoops toward you, it's probably after the insect hovering above your head.
- Bats have a sonar system (echolocation) that allows them to navigate at break-neck speed in total darkness. Nothing built by humans can compare.

White-Nose Syndrome Kills

In 2006, a caver in New York noticed hibernating bats with an unusual white substance on their muzzles, like frost on the beard of a skier. This *White-Nose Syndrome* has been linked to a newly-discovered fungus that has already killed more than a million bats. White-Nose Syndrome causes bats to freeze or starve to death because they come out of hibernation severely underweight.

Nobody knows where the fungus came from, and there is no known cure.

You Can Help Reduce the Spread

White-Nose Syndrome is primarily spread from bat to bat. However, people can potentially spread the fungal spores among caves, mines, and other bat roost sites with contaminated clothing or equipment.

Although the disease is not yet in Black Hills caves, access is being restricted to protect the bats while researchers continue to look for solutions. Please follow all cave use restrictions, and report unusual bat behavior (winter daytime flight; dead or dying bats on the ground) to a State wildlife office.

We will never have a better chance to save our bats from this devastating disease than now - before it arrives.

Black Hills National Forest
 Caring for the Land and Serving People

THE CLASSICS

Creating Environmental Publications: A Guide to Writing and Designing for Interpreters and Environmental Educators. Zehr, Jeffery, Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman. James Heintzman, consulting ed. Interpreter's Handbook Series. Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc. 1994.

Exhibit Labels – An Interpretive Approach, by Beverly Serrell, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California. 1996.

Interpretation for the 21st Century – Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture, by Larry Beck and Ted Cable, Sagamore Publishing, Champaign, IL.

Scenic Byways – A Design Guide for Roadside Improvements, Yamada, Ostergaard, Jilbert, Brunswick, USDA Forest Service, San Dimas Technology and Development Center. July 2002.

Sign, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits Connecting People and Places, by Suzanne Trapp, Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman, College of Natural Resources, UWSP, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715) 346-2076.