



INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

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Current Project List

- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Exhibit Mgmt.
Ft. Harrison SP
Indiana Dunes SP

Interpretive Planning
Monroe Reservoir
Brookville Reservoir

Interpretive Signs
Pokagon State Park
CCC Camp

Interpretive Brochure
Pokagon State Park
CCC Camp Walking Tour

- **Bloomington Parks and Recreation (IN)**
B-Line Trail signs, Phase II

Exhibit Design

The Value of a Content Meeting

The park was located on Lake Michigan, and the influence of the Great Lakes could be seen in the plants, animals, geology and climate. The prospect of new exhibits to tell this story was greatly anticipated.

An initial meeting with the selected exhibit company was held. Discussion focused on the interpretive plan, themes and sub-themes. Exhibit ideas were brainstormed.

When the first conceptual drawings arrived a few weeks later, the concepts followed the earlier discussion. Some of the concepts, however, over-simplified what was actually happening at the site. For example, the bird migration exhibit failed to address the effect of the Great Lakes on migration. Lake Michigan is a dangerous crossing for songbirds, and a protected resting area for waterfowl. Its dunes create thermals for migrating birds of prey. Watershed and plant succession exhibits addressed those concepts in general terms, but failed to address their relationship to Lake Michigan.

So who was at fault? As interpreters, we are the experts at explaining complex concepts to audiences. The exhibit designers are merely another audience. They need to have a very clear understanding so that they aren't sent "back to the drawing board."

A content meeting at the start of an exhibit project is now an important part of my exhibit project kick-off. Depending on the site, a content meeting could include a

guided hike or tour. Minimally it is an interpretive explanation of what's happening at the site.

Don't assume that exhibit designers are ecologists, ornithologists or botanists. Even those with interpretive credentials are new to your site and need to be brought up to speed. Providing designers with volumes of research, management reports, etc. may or may not be helpful. They don't have your science background, so those reports may not be clear to them.

Back to the new exhibits . . .
Once the content meeting was

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The idea for this soil color matching activity came about during a content meeting.

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Visit our website www.interprettiveideas.com

Lise Schools, Owner

lise@interprettiveideas.com

517/347-0861

Okemos, MI 48805-0355

P.O. Box 355

Interprettive Ideas

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held, the designers “got it”, and their mental wheels began to turn. They returned with ideas that were both creative and accurate.

Lesson Learned

Including a content meeting at the start of a project will save time for both the client and the exhibit designers. It will also ensure that the site’s story is being accurately told.

