



INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

Spring 2012, Volume 12, Issue 2

Current Project List

- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Planning,
Milliken State Park
(through Smith Group/JJR)
- **Toledo Metroparks (OH)**
Interpretive Planning
Middlegrounds Park
(through Smith Group/JJR)
- **Park Forest Parks Dept. (IL)**
Interpretive Sign Project
Rail Fan Park
- **Meridian Township Parks (MI)**
Interpretive Sign Project
Red Cedar River Overlook
- **Bloomington Parks and Recreation (IN)**
Bloomington High School
Interpretive Sign
B-Line Trail
- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Exhibit Mgmt.
Ft. Harrison SP

INKLINGS is available in pdf format. To get on the pdf list, contact lise@interpretiveideas.com

Interpretation from the Ground Up

Including interpretation in park planning

Lise Schools

The property was an undeveloped parcel of land, donated to the municipal agency by an adjacent business. Design plans were completed and approved. I was asked to create interpretive signs for the "Nature Trail". Upon reviewing the location of the trail, I noticed that it circumnavigated a softball field. The trail was entirely in mowed grass. Signs were to be on the generic topics of "Birds of ___ Park"; "Wildlife of _____ Park". Ignored were the woodlands, stream, and geological features that would have created a unique interpretive experience.

Bringing interpretation into the initial planning process can benefit a park's design in a number of ways.

1. Interpretation maintains a themed focus on the site.

People come to the initial planning table with their own interests and background. Including a broad spectrum of participants is good. With all of these different interests, however, comes the need to maintain focus on the site's unique story. An interpretive theme keeps the planning process from becoming a free-for-all of special interests unrelated to the site. It provides a specific message that the visitor can embrace. It gives visitors a reason to visit the park.

2. The interpretive theme is designed into all aspects.

The interpretive message can be woven throughout a park's design. For example, if a water feature is planned . . . Can the feature be designed to tie to the park's historical theme with an interactive water wheel? Canal locks? If the property has a marine theme, the water feature could be designed to include tides, waves or marine life. By designing the interpretive theme into the water feature, it now becomes an educational tool for school groups and self-guided interpretation.

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Above: Original concept of a replica sandstone water feature at the gallery entry.

Below: Thanks to input from the property interpreter, the final design included coal seams and iron stains. This made the feature a visual aid for interpretive programs.

Project

Turkey Run State Park
Design/Build: Taylor Studios
Project Mgr. for DNR: Lise Schools



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Interpretive Ideas

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3. Interpretation that functions.

Interpretive spaces that function well should be included in the design. For example, if school groups are a target group, a school bus turn-around and parking is needed. A gathering area for programming must include enough seating for a class and a place to eat sack lunches. An open area for an active interpretive game is useful. A roofed area is good for inclement weather and hot sun. Loop trails to features are important. Safe and non-damaging access to the water's edge for taking water samples or fishing programs is another example of designing for interpretation.

Including interpretation in the planning and design phases ensures that the park will better tell its unique story and connect with visitors.