

State of Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: **DNR Cooperative/Partnership Sign Policy**

REASON FOR CHANGE: Newly created manual code

OVERVIEW

With the advent of many new partnerships with non-profit conservation groups, the Department has been receiving an increasing number of requests to place signs on Department-managed lands that recognize the partnerships or cooperative projects or contain special messages usually related to conservation. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the placement of signs on Department-managed lands. The policy is intended to limit visual impact on the natural environment, prevent proliferation of signs on public lands, and define the roles and responsibilities of all parties regarding sign ownership, maintenance and costs.

Designated statewide trail networks that cross state lands will be exempted from new sign agreements. The exemption will apply to the North Country National Scenic and State Trail and the Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail and snowmobile trails, provided they have a published signing plan and/or sign standards that are part of cooperative agreements related to the trail.

To help set the context, the following section contains a brief summary of how the Department has used signs and signing on the public lands it manages. This is followed by requirements for these types of signs.

BACKGROUND

The Department’s policy is to minimize signing. Signs are considered an intrusion on the natural environment and are used sparingly on Department-managed public lands and buildings.

In general, the Department places signs at key access points only; often they are grouped in kiosks, to reduce sign clutter, and should be a minimum of 75 feet from the water’s edge, unless closer proximity to the water is essential. The use of signs is typically limited to informing people of issues of public health and safety, critical rules and regulations, or information directly related to the property.

The Department’s Sign Handbook ([8672.05](#)) provides specifications for official Department signs. The handbook has evolved over many years and covers a wide array of Department signs. These typically include property entrance signs, regulatory and informational signs, and boundary markers, etc. However, the handbook provides no specific guidance for cooperative/partnership signs on state lands.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Cooperative signs will be considered a donation to the Department. The donation will generally consist of all the material, including the signs, posts, and fasteners, and often sign placement. Gifts of signs that total less than \$1000 may be accepted by the property manager with the approval of the regional director (or the bureau director where appropriate). For gifts in excess of \$1000, see Manual Code [1403.11](#), Procedure for Accepting Gifts and Bequests. Natural Resources Board approval will be required if the value of the sign exceeds \$5000.

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SECRETARY’S DIRECTIVE PSH

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All Manual Code Holders

Special Instructions:
(Underlining indicates weblinks)

2. Cooperative signs can be placed on Department lands only with a written agreement that spells out the design, language, terms, and conditions, including a beginning and ending date or provision for renewal for a specific period of time (e.g., five-year interval). Responsibility for the future maintenance of the sign for as long as the sign remains on Department-managed public lands, should also be spelled out. All sign agreements will be reviewed and signed by:
 1. The property manager
 2. A regional supervisor
 3. Appropriate Department program bureaus (bureau directors or designees) depending on underlying land management responsibility.

It will be the responsibility of the appropriate Department program bureaus to assure that the sign message is consistent with Department policies and regulations.

All sign design must be approved in advance of production and be approved by the property manager prior to erecting signs. The Department shall have final approval of all designs, materials, posts, and placement for these signs.

3. All cooperative signs placed on Department lands will be checked by the Department for damage during annual property inspections. Notice will be given to the responsible parties at that time of any damage with the understanding that repairs will be made in a timely manner. The Department reserves the right to remove the cooperative signs that are in disrepair, badly weathered, or vandalized, or if the sign's message becomes inconsistent with current state regulations and policies.
4. The cooperative signs and the message must be related to the purposes for which the land was acquired and to an existing department program (e.g., outdoor recreation, conservation education, hunting, fishing, boating, etc.) and must be consistent with the Department's overall mission.
5. Signs will be of moderate size so as not to dominate the site, setting, or vista. The design of all cooperators signs should have a balanced, harmonious appearance, taking into account color, type size, and font, and should include quality graphics with the goal of creating an easy-to-read display.
6. All signs will clearly identify the Department and the cooperator group or organization with a text line and/or appropriate logo of equal size.
7. All cooperative signs will be placed in accordance with Department handbook standards ([8672.05](#)). The handbook provides guidance on design, materials, ways to reduce sign clutter, the use of appropriate sign supports, etc.
8. The Department may deny placement of cooperative signs at sites where it might confuse or distract the viewer from more critical safety or regulatory signs.
9. Types of signs and messages that will not be allowed on Department-managed lands include but are not limited to:
 - Signs not related to natural resource issues.
 - Signs with advertising for services or products.
 - Signs with a religious or political message.
 - Signs with vulgar or inflammatory language.