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The Sign Program Newsletter US Army Corps of Engineers

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In This Issue

Welcome back to *The Sign Post*, the informal periodic newsletter of “topics of interest” to Corps employees involved with signs and the National Sign Program.

This issue contains the fresh new update on the Corps recreation fee signage as it relates to *EC 1130-2-550, Chapter 9* that everyone has been waiting for.

Also included is an article for sign program first-timers and a field assessment exercise.

Thanks for all of those who helped make this issue possible. And thanks to all sign folk nationwide for your hard work in making the Corps sign program into the envy among the federal agencies!

USACE Recreation Fee Signage Update

Diane L. Stratton

USACE Interagency Pass Coordinator

The USACE Recreation Use Fee Program will be seeing some changes effective January 1, 2016 as a result of the implementation of *EC 1130-2-550, Chapter 9*.

Congressional passage of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 granted the Secretary of the Army the authority to participate fully in the *America the Beautiful Interagency Pass Program*. The USACE Projects will begin issuing, selling and accepting the *Interagency Passes* (Annual, Senior, Access, Military, *Every Kid in a Park* and Volunteer).

Minimum day use fees have been increased and Projects can now adjust their day use fees by doing a comparability study biannually. The minimum Day Use fee will be \$5 for non-commercial vehicle; \$20 for Commercial Vehicles (bus and Van); and \$2 for bike-in/walk-in. The Corps of Engineers *Annual Pass* will increase from \$30 to \$40. Holders of an *Interagency Passes* and *Golden Age/Access Passports* will be allowed access to boat launches and swimming beaches at USACE-managed areas free of charge. Children under the age of 16 will

also be allowed access to Corps recreation facilities free of charge.

The minimum camping fees have also been increased and projects should review the *EC 1130-2-550, Chapter 9* for more details on these fees. Holders of the *Interagency Access/Senior Passes* and *Golden Age/Access Passports* will continue to receive half off the single unit campsite fee.

Additionally, all sales of the *Interagency Passes* will be retained at the Project where the pass fees were collected. USACE Pass sales through the USGS Fulfillment Center will be invested at recreation projects nationally.

It is recommended that all project team members read the *EC 1130-2-550, Chapter 9*, USACE Recreation Use Fee Standard Operation Procedure (RUF SOP), and Guide to Implementation located on the NRM Gateway, Recreation Use Fees page, Policy & Procedures section at <http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/policy.cfm?Id=usefeesprog&Code=All>



USACE Recreation Fee Signage Update

Jeff Mangum

Sign Advisory Work Group Chairman

Headquarters has recently released a new Engineering Circular that affects the Corps fee program. This change in fees affects projects with posted fee amounts on their recreation signage.

Diane Stratton's article (on the front page) spells out some of the basic nuts and bolts of the program referred to in *EC 1130-2-550, Chapter 9*. The National Sign Program Manager and the Sign Advisory Work Group (SAWG) have worked with Diane Stratton and Headquarters to come up with modified sign design options to reflect this policy change.

The updated signs are not yet in SignPro, but can be ordered through UNICOR and the Truman Sign Shop.

The New Signs

You will notice that the new sign layout is a little easier to read than the older one because it is formatted like a menu. In *Example 1*, you'll notice the fees are listed on the right side. Since the dollar amounts are even, the cents have been removed to make the sign simpler and a little bit smaller.

Also, instead of listing the names of all of the individual federal passes accepted at the Corps facilities, the wording was changed to "*Federal Recreation Pass Holders*," which should not need to be changed if new passes are added or older ones discontinued.

Options

There are three main options available to choose from in order to communicate the new fee schedule to the public. Regardless of which option is chosen, keep in mind that sooner than later, all signs with the old fee amounts and wording will need to be replaced with signs bearing the new information.

Individual project Sign Program Managers (SPMs) will work with their supervisors to determine which

option is most feasible for their given budgets and manpower. Project SPMs should keep their district SPMs in the loop as they proceed to make sign orders.

When planning for fee signage, read and re-read pages 7-6 through 7-10 of the *Sign Standards Manual*. As you look at the signs in each recreation area from the perspective of the first-time visitor, it will be much easier to place the signs in a way that "makes sense."

Option 1: Complete swap-out of older signs for the new signs.

Example 1 below is a complete swap-out of the old signs for the new ones. The new signs have the correct amounts listed. As specified in the *Sign Standards*

Day Use Fees	
	
Private Vehicle	\$5
Walk-in/Bike-in	\$2
Bus/Commercial	\$20
Annual Pass	\$40
Federal Recreation Pass Holders	Free
Under 16	Free

Example 1 — Revised ENT-05 (29.5A x 19A)

Mandatory
For beaches, not boat ramps
Optional at boat ramps
Optional
Mandatory
For beaches, not boat ramps

Manual (page 7-9), "actual legend content may vary depending on local rules, fee season, and recreation area." In other words, the sign is a "pick list" as it were, meaning you select only the lines that apply to each recreation area for which the sign is posted.

The line which states *Annual Pass*, or *Corps Annual Pass* should only be placed on the sign if the Corps of Engineers *Annual Pass* is actually being sold at an accessible manned station where the fees are being collected.

When replacing an older sign that is supported by wood posts, it is best to remove the old posts and change them out with newer ones that have been freshly stained with the Corps brown color. In the case

of a two-post mounded sign, the new dimensions may be wider or narrower than what was there before.

The dangling “Day Use Area Full” attachable panel is still an option for this and the other signs listed here.

Option 2: Alternative for entry to a fee area where fees are listed at the fee payment station/box.

A new sign is now available that doesn’t list fees, as shown in *Example 2*. Instead of posting the fee amounts on the sign, they are itemized either at the payment box with a small sign or on a bulletin board right next to the box.

The legend on this sign can be slightly customized, depending on the use. At boat ramps, don’t include the “Under 16 - Free” line. The “All Others Must Pay Posted Fee” line can be amended with “At Fee Box” or whatever is best for each situation. Work with your NRM supervisor and district SPM for the best answer to each area’s circumstances.

Option 3: Temporarily updating existing signage with reflective vinyl patches (Field Correction).

As seen in *Example 3*, correcting the fee amounts of an existing sign with reflective vinyl patches is a temporary fix to the new fee schedule.

This option has been put forth because the National Sign Committee and Headquarters understand the limitations of project budgets, especially given the short suspense for the integration of this new fee program across the nation.

This is the least desirable option for a number of reasons. First, it’s only meant to be a temporary fix, meaning the sign will still need to be swapped out. The time and effort it takes to order the material and

meticulously apply it will still cost your budget. Also, when applying new vinyl material over older weathered material, it is impossible to make a comparable color match. As seen in the illustration, it doesn’t look very presentable to the public. It is highly recommend-

ed that only those with experience, fine motor skills, and a keen eye for detail attempt this method. A failed attempt at correcting a sign can make it look far worse.

If you choose this method, notify UNICOR or one of the Corps sign shops for the material you need. Measure the dimensions with precision, including the letter height, length of the strips to be applied, and so on. This is not a money maker for them, so

please be considerate and take as little of their time as you can when ordering.

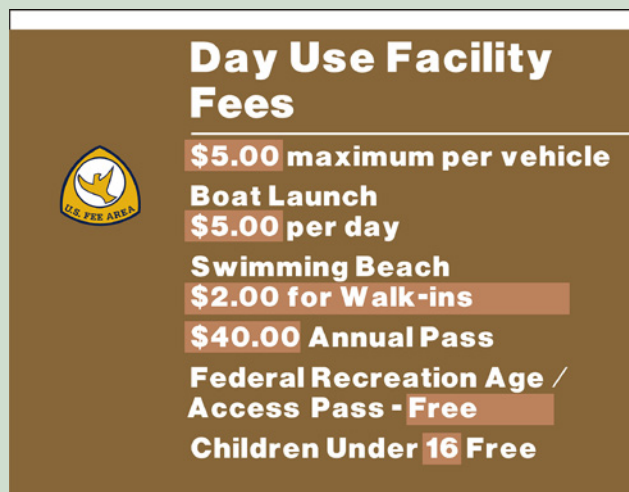
Another way to do this is to remove the actual vinyl lettering with a petroleum-based solvent such as mineral spirits or kerosene. Follow the proper personal protection protocol and all HAZMAT procedures when doing so. When the solvent has been completely wiped dry after removing the old letters, the new cut reflective vinyl letters may be applied.

This is not recommended for signs older than two or so years because the brown base layer weakens and becomes easier to tear as it ages. Be extremely careful when using this method because you cannot undo mistakes.

If you still have questions after reading this signage guidance, speak with your district SPM. District and Division SPMs may speak with a member of the SAWG or the National Sign Program Manager for clarification or questions. Good luck!



Example 2 — For entry to areas with either a manned entrance station or an unmanned area with a posted fee breakdown at the payment box (“iron ranger”)



Example 3 — Patches over older sign (Field Correction)



Resources for the New Sign Program Manager

AJ Jensen

National Sign Program Manager

Maybe you are new to the Sign Program. Or maybe you're a seasoned veteran. So think back to the time that you were first assigned as a project Sign Program Manager. There was a lot to take in, wasn't there?

At first, you're peppy and ready to conquer the program to make it the picture-perfect example of what a project's signage should look like, aren't you? By and by, you realize these things take time. Reading the Sign Manual, ordering, managing budgets, prioritizing, installing, performing maintenance on signs—and all of this competes with the other duties you have. You quickly find that this is an ongoing effort.

As you spend time in the *Sign Standards Manual*, you learn the authorized way of doing things, and then you say to yourself, "Wow! I can think of several signs on project that don't follow this guidance." Then you realize that replacing or bringing them up to standards requires time and funding, but you have limited amounts of each.

So you put the non-compliant signs on the mental back-burner, and that's where they stay. "I'll deal with them later," you tell yourself, and you carry on with your other duties. Eventually, your mind becomes numb to those out-of-compliance signs. They stay just as they are—without a plan to repair, replace, or remove them.

This is a common scenario across the Corps. Early on, I caught myself in that same rut. Sure, a couple of work mates told me a helpful thing or two about signs, and I even got some useful ideas from my district Sign Program Manager (SPM), but apart from that, I had no formal sign program training. My "awakening" took place when I finally downloaded the *Sign Standards Manual* and actually started to read it. I also downloaded the *MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices)* published by the Federal Highway Administration) and found lots of answers there, too. Before long, I had become a subject-matter expert, and my project sign program began to improve dramatically.

Managing a well-run project sign program can be one of the most rewarding duties in the Corps. There are several key elements to getting and staying there.

I hope to share a few ways to keep your project sign program fresh, relevant, agile, and compliant to regulation.

The Sign Standards Manual

The first thing to do for any newly assigned project Sign Program Manager (SPM) is to download the *Sign Standards Manual (EP 310-1-6a & b)*, *Volume I* and *Volume II* from the *NRM Gateway*. The manual is the official policy that we are required to follow, as specified by regulation (*ER 1130-2-500, 6-2b*). There's really no other way to learn the program than to read the *Sign Standards Manual*. You may be bored out of your mind (or maybe not), but you've got to actually *read* at least the first four chapters and Chapter 7 — *Recreation Area Signs*, which comprehensively explain the principles critical to having an orderly and compliant program.

After reading the first four chapters and Chapter 7, refer to the remaining chapters as needed. At least familiarize yourself with them by thumbing through. They are organized by sign type. You'll find several helpful layout and placement scenarios through those chapters that will help customize your project's sign program to meet its location-specific needs.

Volume II of the *Sign Standards Manual* (also found on the *Gateway*) is the official guidance that details the *technical* standards to follow in sign manufacture, installation, and maintenance. It's the section that specifies staining the posts the Corps brown color. It's an essential resource for a successful sign program. Don't overlook *Volume II*.

District Sign Program Manager

The district Sign Program Manager (SPM) performs a role vital to the success of your project's sign program. While you are responsible for all things sign-related at your project, the district SPM is responsible to ensure all projects within the district have adequate guidance and direction for success.

The district SPM is in charge of sign-related training throughout the district. Usually someone with extensive experience with signs in the field, he or she should be able to answer (or help you to find answers



for) your sign program questions.

The district SPM is in charge of quality assurance. Take a peek at ER 1130-2-500, which says: “To ensure consistency, the district sign program manager shall approve all orders for signs at civil works projects” (6-2b (2)). This means all sign orders must be reviewed and approved by the district SPM *before* you buy them. The district SPM will scrutinize the proposed order for compliance to the standards and appropriateness of each sign.

He or she is not there to harrass you or stop you from doing anything, but to quality-check your orders for adherence to Corps standards and principles, and to help ensure you find the right solutions for your project’s signage needs.

If you have needs for custom sign messages, your district SPM will help you find solutions that comply with the standards. He or she will also help you submit requests for variation in safety sign legends (Danger, Warning, Caution) as outlined in the *Sign Standards Manual*.

SignPro

SignPro is the official software used by the Corps to order and inventory signs. The guidance outlines *SignPro* as “...the tool to use to manage the Sign Standards Program at the project level” (EP 1130-2-500, Para. 6-3, i). It further states that “Project sign plans, inventories, and orders shall be kept current using *SignPro*.”

Your district SPM will help you to get a *SignPro* account and school you on *SignPro* basics. *SignPro* is pretty comprehensive with its ability to help you manage your project sign plan. At first use, you’ll see that it may not be the easiest database program to work with, but with some hands-on experience, you’ll find it will help you do most of what you need to do. If there are things that you find are not working like you need them to, detail them in an e-mail and send them to your district SPM.

Sign Plan

The *Project Sign Management Plan* (or simply “*Sign Plan*” for short) is a master document that “provides the framework for managing an effective sign program” (*Sign Standards Manual*, p. 3-1). It is a subset of the project’s

Operational Management Plan (OMP), specifically the *Park Management* portion of the OMP (EP 1130-2-550, 3-3 d, (1)(b) & Table 3-2, line K). When kept current, your *Sign Plan* will not only help you manage your sign inventory and plan for sign maintenance or replacements, but will serve as a useful communication tool to your supervisor for your project’s sign program needs.

The *Sign Standards Manual* states that you, the project SPM, are responsible for the development of a comprehensive *sign plan* (p. 3-3), and that the district SPM is responsible for the review and approval of the plan. That’s a big responsibility, especially if your project doesn’t have one or it has been neglected. Your first step in getting your *Sign Plan* off to a good start is to make sure everything is up-to-date in *SignPro*.

While the standards outlined in the *Sign Standards Manual* are established and clear, there are some cases that require variation. In such instances, work closely with your district SPM to find the right solutions, and yes, document them in your *Sign Plan*. This will serve to communicate your intent not only for your program successor, but may also serve to shield you from liability in the event of a legal challenge.

I expect to share more information on how to draft and manage a *Sign Plan* in the not-too-distant future. Look forward to future copies of *The Sign Post* for additional useful program tips and tricks.

This is not a comprehensive list of all of the resources available to you, but some of the most fundamental ones. You’ll find that networking with NRM folk at other projects will help as well. Foster a good working relationship with your district SPM. As the National Sign Program Manager, I also expect to work with the Sign Advisory Work Group to make more training resources available in the upcoming calendar year. Be on the look-out for more good stuff.

Welcome to the team! Enjoy your time with the sign program!

For Sign Program resources, including a list of district and division SPMs, visit the Gateway at: corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/sign/sign.cfm

Field Observations

AJ Jensen

National Sign Program Manager

Signs age as they are exposed to the elements. The sun beats down on your signs, then the weather freezes. Graffiti, gunshots, vehicle accidents—any of these steal the life away from your signs.

Monitoring Signs in the Field

It's important to monitor signs in the field through regular inspections. The vinyl materials, depending on their quality, have a definite lifespan. All things being equal, engineering-grade reflective vinyl is only expected to last seven or eight years. High-Intensity Prismatic (HIP) material may last 10 or 11 years.

Performing regular upkeep on your signs may help you get a couple of years of extra life out of them. At any rate, staying abreast of their current condition will help you get a good feel for the maintenance they require or even when to swap them out.

Since your supervisor is generally the person whose approval you need to spend money on signs and sign maintenance, be sure to communicate with him or her about your program's needs. The basic way to do this is by maintaining a current *Sign Plan*. To go further, take your supervisor and another workmate out to the field to observe the condition of the project's signs. Plan and develop new signs with your supervisor's input.

Don't become too attached to any particular sign. Remember that signs are there to guide people, not to domi-

nate everything they do. To install a sign is a decision that has to be appropriate for the circumstances on the ground. Remember not to install a sign simply because there is a bare spot on the ground. There are some times when *not* signing a place is the best decision. There may also be times when removing an unnecessary sign is the right thing to do.

Field Exercise

I've included photos of a few of the signs that I have observed in the field. I've determined that some of the signs need maintenance, while others need to be completely replaced. Some of them have crooked posts. None of the posts of the signs I have taken pictures of have been properly stained the Corps brown color. I'm not being critical, but observant. If I can spot things that vary from our best practices, so can the public.

We use the *Sign Standards Manual* as our standard on which our observations are based. We strive for the standard and go from there. Some of my assessments are references to the Sign Standards Manual, while others are my own opinions on how to improve a sign's effectiveness. Just putting that out there.

Take a look at these photos and see what you think. Give this type of exercise a try at your own project, and you may be surprised at what you find. Hopefully, doing this will help you as you plan for your project's sign program needs. Have fun!

Field Photos

Observation:

Posts aged, cracked, and not maintained; multiple rusty screws through sign face leave oxidation streaking stains.

Issue:

Deteriorating and neglected appearance can give a bad first impression to visitors.

Recommended Action:

Following the recommended maintenance schedule and installation procedures may have preserved this sign for another couple of years. Now, it's time to think about replacing the sign with a new one.





Observation:

Aged stop sign is out of compliance with retro-reflectivity requirements; posts are not stained; street name signs are on a different post.

Issue:

Retroreflectivity requirements are top priority for traffic signs; posts should look neat, not weathered.

Recommended Action:

Replace this stop sign as soon as you can; posts should be stained; optional: place street signs above stop signs to reduce clutter and look neater (it's authorized, MUTCD p. 163, para. 21).

Observation:

Corps Signature is faded, cracked, and peeling away.

Issue:

This is our Signature, which should be a showpiece on all of our signs. It is weathered beyond repair.

Recommended Action:

Time for a replacement sign.



Observation:

Sign is faded beyond repair. Post is not stained Corps brown.

Issue:

Unprofessional appearance.

Recommended Action:

Cycle out for replacement.



Observation:

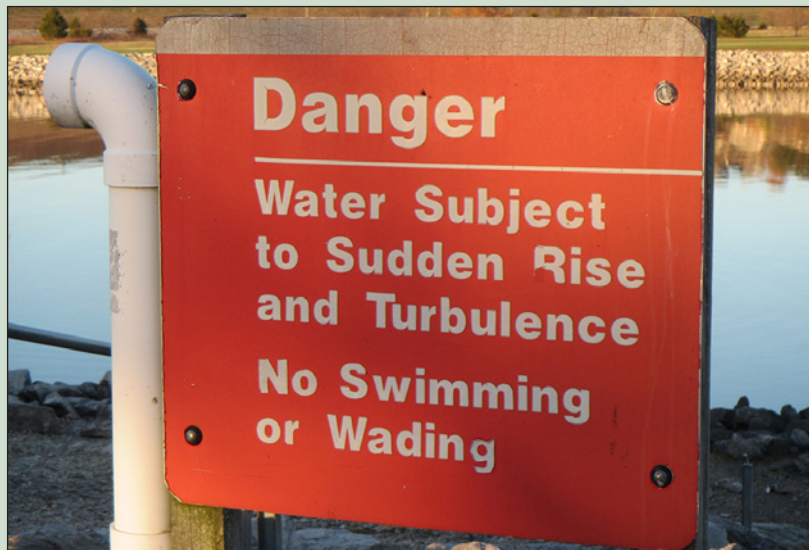
Sign lettering and top white bar are cracked, peeling, and missing. White tube is attached to sign.

Issue:

The safety message is diminished by the ragged appearance of the sign. The white tube should not be attached to a safety sign for the same reason.

Recommended Action:

Replacement. Remove white collection tubes from all signs, especially safety signs.



Observation:

Non-compliant sign in ragged condition on a rag-tag barrier.

Issue:

Neglected posts make the sign look less professional and detract from its message. The shabby fence also detracts from the sign's seriousness.

Recommended Action:

Replace sign with Corps sign with the same legend. Mend the fence to add a professional look to the area being signed.



Observation:

Posts have not been inset. Fasteners (bolts) are driven through the white bars. Unstained posts.

Issue:

Project Directional and Approach Directional signs have inset posts. Fasteners through lettering or the white bars detract from the sign. Posts need to be stained.

Recommended Action:

The letters (A-height) are 4" tall, so the outside of the posts should be inset 8" from sign's left and right edges. Don't drill through white bars. Stain posts Corps brown.





Observation:

Temporary sign is shoddy and illegible.

Issue:

All signs should be legible, even temporary ones. Message will be ignored.

Recommended Action:

Replace or remove sign. Project Sign Program Manager and supervisor should look at a better solution. One possibility is to post this type of message on a bulletin board.

Observation:

Stop sign is too low to the ground. Unstained post.

Issue:

Standards call for the bottom traffic control signs to be at least 60" (5') off the plane of the driving surface. They can be overlooked when they are too low.

Recommended Action:

Raise sign to proper minimum height. Stain post.



Observation:

Unrelated sign tacked onto a handicapped parking sign. Unstained post.

Issue:

Each post should have one message. Tacking a state fishing regulation notice takes away from the message and professional appearance of the handicapped parking sign.

Recommended Action:

Move state sign to a bulletin board or separate post. Stain post.

