

Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signing and Placement

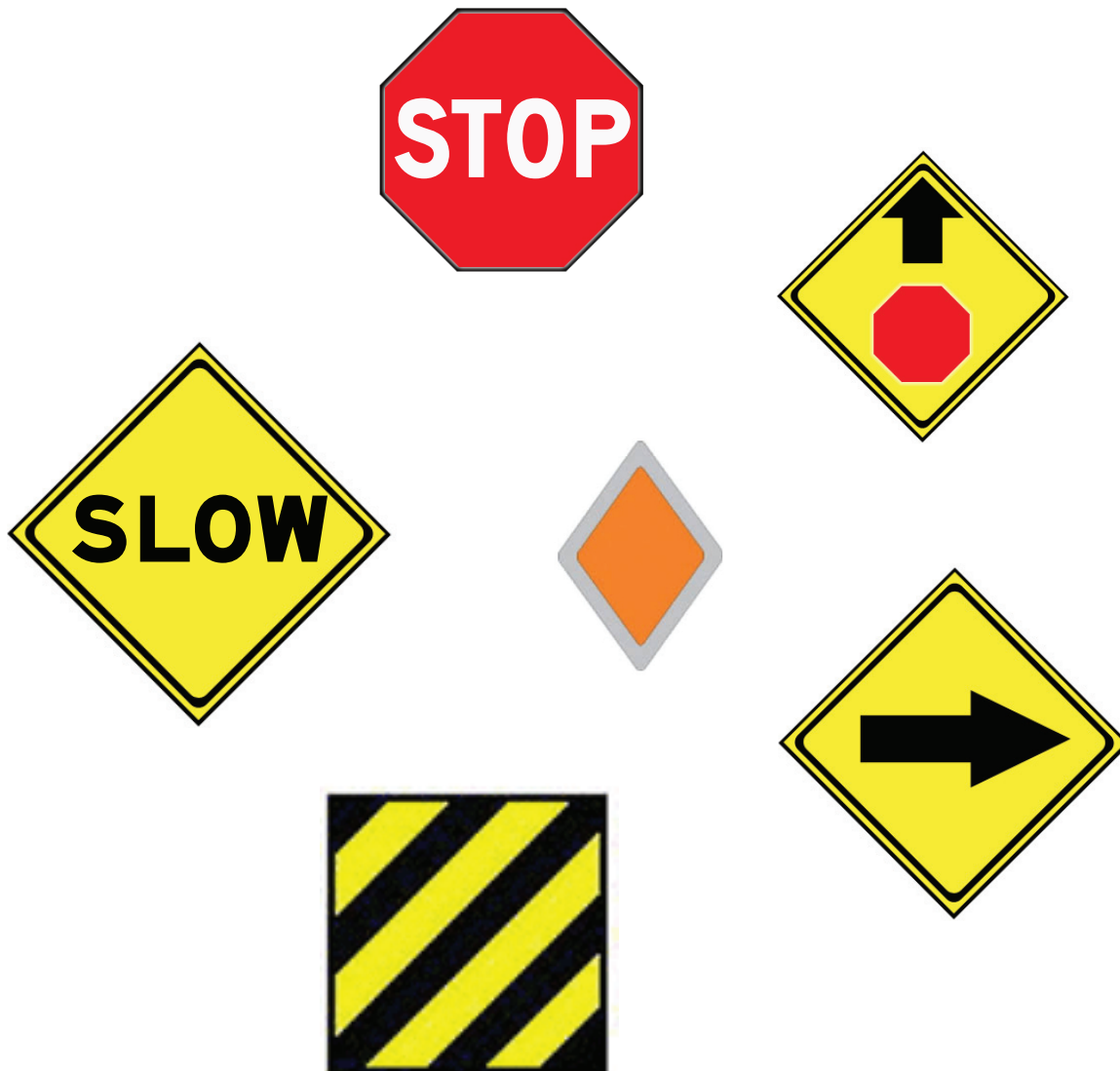


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Snowmobile North Dakota



1.0 Introduction

Snowmobilers travel beyond their local trail systems much more frequently now than ever before. When traveling on unfamiliar trails a riders' enjoyment and safety are greatly enhanced by uniform trail markings, detailed information signage, and careful identification of potential hazards. Few experiences in snowmobiling rival for the unpleasantness feeling of being lost, hungry and low on fuel somewhere along a poorly signed trail system.

The signing suggestions provided in this guide should not be construed as minimizing the rider's responsibility to operate their vehicle in a reasonable, responsible, and prudent manner on the trails.

The trail administrator, land owner, rider, local club, and organized snowmobiling in general all benefit from good basic signing practices.

The purposes of snowmobile trail signs are to:

- regulate the flow of traffic along the trails,
- inform riders of trail characteristics, and
- provide information necessary to the enjoyment of the trail riding experience.

Uniform snowmobile trail signing will:

- enhance the safety and security of persons, vehicles, and property,
- improve travel within and between districts, and
- professionalize and promote recreational snowmobiling.

Many jurisdictions have developed and implemented excellent comprehensive signing programs. In other areas, local traffic conditions or limited resources make elaborate signing systems inappropriate or impossible. The principles and guidelines offered here are intended to complement safe riding practices for a safe and enjoyable trail riding experience.

It should be noted that laws and regulations are different in all of the member jurisdictions. These differences may result in signing program guidelines which vary from this document. This guideline is intended to create uniform signing for snowmobile trails internationally, however liability laws and program mandates need to be reviewed fully by each jurisdiction and an appropriate signing program determined from that review.

2.0 Purpose of this Document

This document provides guidelines for the effective placement of signs on recreational snowmobile trails. It should be seen as a process to improve snowmobile trail development in a safe and cost effective manner as opposed to a rigid policy statement. It is anticipated that as a result of ongoing communication and development, these guidelines will continue to evolve through time.

The International Association of Snowmobile Administrators (IASA) recognizes that the suggested guidelines contained in this document may not be the best recommendation, or indeed even practical in certain specific situations. This being the case, IASA would recommend that this document be considered general guidelines for the development of your trail signing program. This sign placement guideline should be used as a supplement to the Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signing adopted by the IASA in 2000.

3.0 Trail Signing Guidelines

The International Association of Snowmobile Administrators has developed this manual to provide the minimum guidelines for regulatory, caution signs, and trail markers. These guidelines should be applied to all officially designated snowmobile trails. Each state and province should develop guidelines for their own information and guide signs. Their placement should follow the guidelines described in Section 4.



Snowmobile North Dakota



4.0 Trail Sign Placement

This section provides basic information on how snowmobile trail signs are to be oriented and installed.

4.1 Sign Orientation

The most critical part of sign mounting is understanding how reflective signs work. One good analogy is to think of reflective signs as mirrors. To maximize the nighttime view of the sign it must be placed at eye level, perpendicular to the direction of travel of the trail. This orientation also ensures that the sign is visible over the longest possible period so that the rider has a chance to understand the message and to react accordingly. This important concept is illustrated by Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3 defines an imaginary “window” for sign locations. Signs should be oriented perpendicular to trail within a 5' x 5' area which starts 3' from the trails edge and 2' above the trail. Signs mounted outside the window will not perform as well.

4.1 Sign Orientation

One of the most frequently asked questions in posting signs is how far in advance of the trail condition should the sign be placed. Table 1 on the following page offers some guidance on what the appropriate sign posting distances should be. These recommendations have been developed through a variety of snowmobile and traffic publications, including the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and field observations. The minimum sign posting distances recommended below pertain only to caution signs.

The sign posting table looks at two situations. The first is a situation where a caution sign is posted so that a snowmobile can come to a complete stop before the trail condition. The most common example of this situation would be a “Stop Ahead,” trail sign prior to a STOP sign. The second signing situation is one where a caution sign is posted so that a snowmobiler might have to reduce speed, but not necessarily come to a complete stop. Examples of this situation might be changes in trail direction. A key factor in using Table 1 is the judgment of the signing crew on what the speed of the majority of reasonable snowmobilers in that situation would be and what reduction in speed, if any, would be necessary for the snowmobiler to comfortably and safely negotiate the trail condition.

Figure 1 - Sign orientation, side view

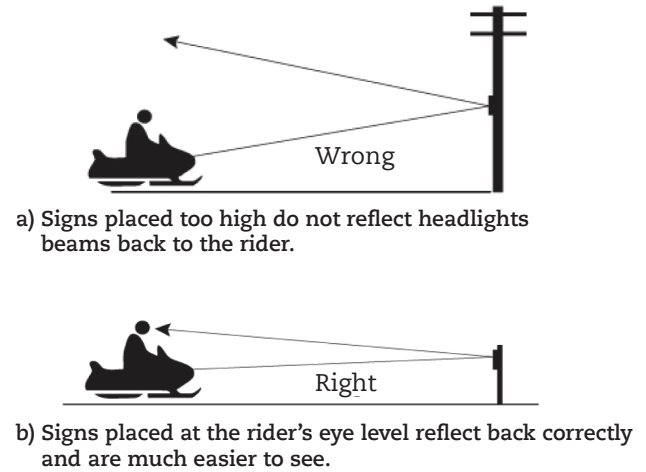


Figure 2 - Sign orientation, plan view

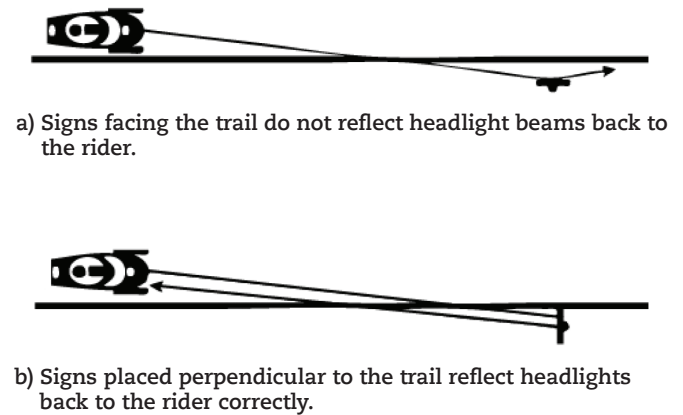


Figure 3 - Recommended sign location window

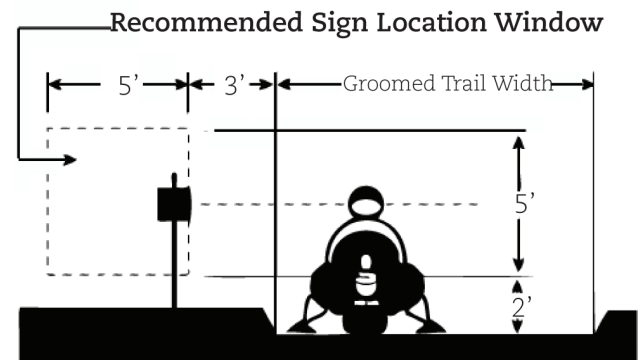


Table 1: Caution Sign Placement

Suggested Minimum Posting Distances for Snowmobile Caution Signs (in feet)					
Judged Speed (mph)	Condition Requiring Stop "X" =	Deceleration Distance to Desired Speed (mph) "Y" =			
		10	20	30	40
20	*	**			
25	*	100	**		
30	175	150	100		
35	225	200	175	**	
40	300	275	250	175	
45	350	350	300	250	**
50	425	400	400	325	225
55	500	500	475	400	300

* No suggested minimum distance recommended. At these speeds, sign location depends on physical conditions at the site.

** No suggested minimum distance recommended. At these 5 mile per hour reductions in speed, location depends on the physical conditions at the site.

Examples showing the use of Table 1 above can be found on pages 7 through 11.

Regulatory signs shall be placed to the side of the trail in accordance with the section 4.1. Unlike caution signs, regulatory signs are located where the desired action is to take place.

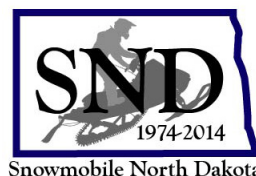
The Table above shows a range of distances for trail sign placements. The Table is adapted from previous IASA Signing Guidelines and is intended as a general guide for sign placement distances. Other studies, specifically those by Michigan Technological Keweenaw Research Center, are specific to defined snow and ice surfaces found during their study. Most snowmobile trails typically have a mix of trail surface conditions and those conditions can change daily depending upon weather conditions and other factors. Terrain also has to be taken into account. For these reasons the IASA guidelines use the signing distance range table shown above.



4.3 Mounting Considerations

The methods used to mount trail signs vary greatly depending on the intended permanence of the installation. The following points provide guidance in selecting an appropriate mounting method to suit your circumstances.

- Generally, signs should be placed to the right of the trail to conform with the riders familiarity with highway signs.
- The sightline from the driver to the sign must be clear for the entire distance though which the sign is intended to be viewed. This requires routine monitoring.
- On private property, signs should be placed as late in the fall as possible and removed promptly at the end of the season. This reduces vandalism, reduces potential trespass, and conserves sign life by reducing exposure to the sun and elements.
- Mounting signs on living trees is not recommended. If it is the only alternative, use aluminum nails. Ensure that all nails are removed when the signs are removed.
- On posts, use bolts or screws instead of nails to reduce vandalism and theft. A cordless drill with spare battery packs is an ideal tool to drive screws providing the sign holes are predrilled.
- Use an existing mounting object, such as a fence post, only if it is within the recommended sign location window and the permission of the landowner has been obtained.
- Use durable materials for permanent installations, i.e. flexible plastic, fiberglass, steel, or wooden post.
- If more than one sign is used at the same location, they should be placed vertically with the most important sign on top.
- It must be remembered that the trail will be used in both directions. Separate and often different signing is required for each direction of travel.
- Signing should be done by persons who are familiar with the trail and who know where they are and where they are going. When putting up signs, imagine that you have never been in this area or on this trail before. Try to picture what signs would be necessary to get you safely to your destination.
- Have your signage reviewed by someone less familiar with the area to identify locations that need improvement.
- Overuse of signs should be avoided. Only authorized trail signs should be allowed to avoid clutter and confusion. Signage posted by business should be carefully controlled by the trail operator.
- Extra regulatory and caution signs should be carried on grooming equipment and by trail patrollers to replace those which have been vandalized.
- Maintaining visibility of signs in areas of heavy snowfall accumulations poses additional challenges in terms of sign mounting techniques and materials. These signing situations will require periodic inspections and adjustment of sign poles or stakes throughout the winter to keep signs from being obliterated by snowfall.



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5.0 Core Trail Sign List

The key to establishing a uniform signing system is the development of a list of core signs based on the IASA Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signing. The regulatory and caution signs listed in this section are suggested by the IASA. Each individual state or province is encouraged to add to this list any additional signs that they feel are appropriate when developing their own trail sign list.

Core Trail Signs



Stop

Instructs riders to bring their snowmobile to a complete stop before proceeding with caution. The sign is 12" x 12" octagon with red background with white lettering.



Snowmobile Trail Blazers

Informs riders that they are on a designated snowmobile trail. Sign is a 5"x 7", 4"x6", 6"x 6" or other sized uneven diamond, orange in color with reflective border, or fully reflectorized.



Stop Ahead

Informs riders they are approaching a stop sign and will need to stop ahead.



Slow

Warns riders that there may be a potentially hazard condition or feature ahead on the trail. Riders are to temporarily slow their snowmobile when seeing this sign so they can watch for the full range of potential hazardous operating conditions that might be present.



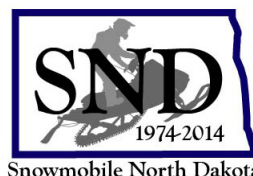
Hazard Marker

Identifies a fixed object at the side of the trail. Used any time the fixed object narrows the normal width of the trail such as bridge railings. The stripes slope down towards the trail. Sign is typically a 6"x 18" vertical rectangle with right side and left side signs, or a 11"x 11" square (minimum).



Directional Arrow

This arrow sign informs riders that the trail ahead makes a distinct change in direction; slow down to ensure you're prepared to safely negotiate the turn. Sign is 12" x 12" diamond with yellow background and black arrow.

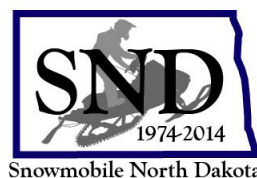


6.0 Examples Of Sign Use

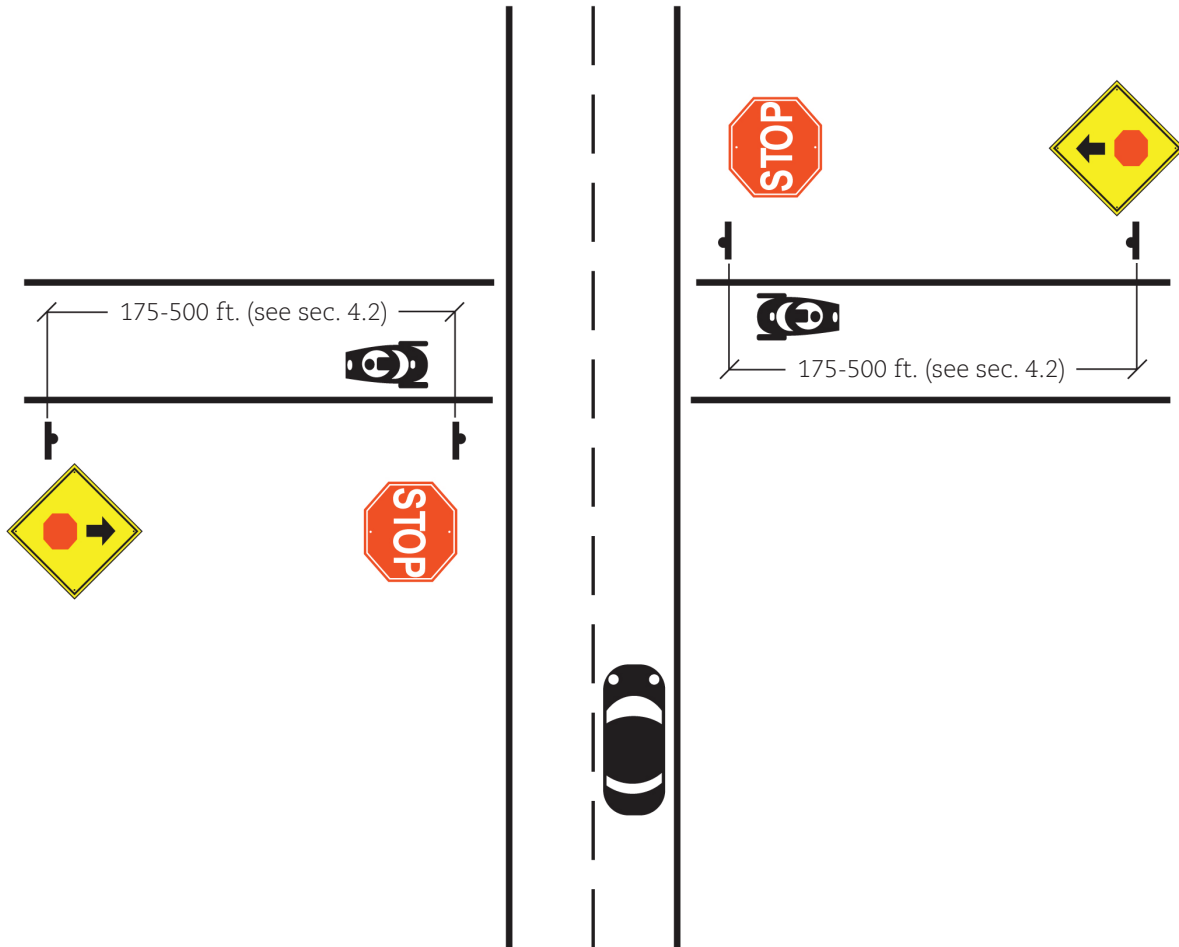
The following six illustrations are intended to give signing crews an example of a few of the basic situations they will encounter on most trails. Only a few of the signs contained in section 5.0 are shown in these illustrated examples.

These illustrations serve as simplistic guidelines for use on snowmobile trails. It is understood that unusual situations may be encountered relating to trail conditions, topography, man made objects, or other circumstances that will require some modifications to typical sign placement. The most suitable placement of each sign must be determined at the site where all variables are visible. It would be prudent to document the case where sign placement is outside the range indicated in this manual and prepare written justification for your files.

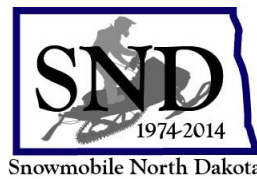
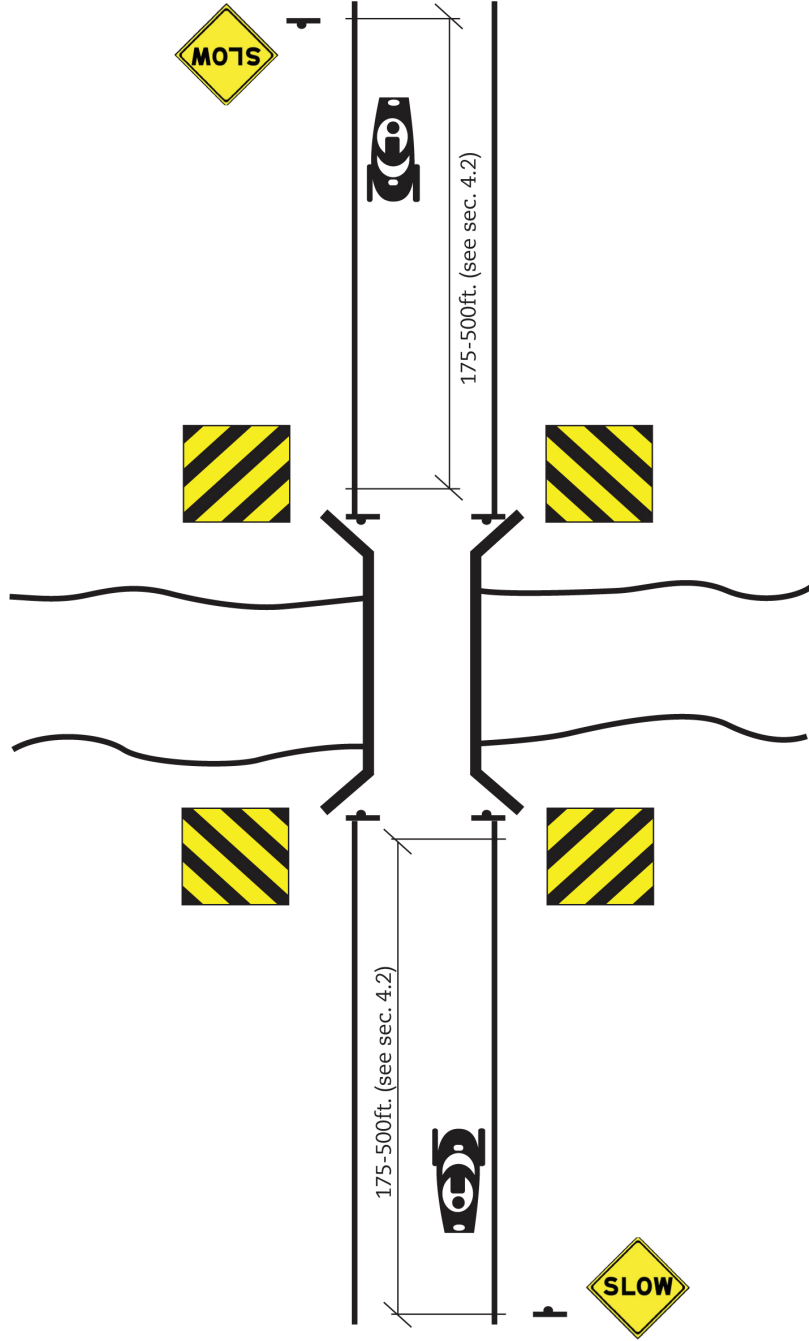
- 6.1 Road Crossing..... (page 8)
- 6.2 Bridge..... (page 9)
- 6.3 Trail Intersection..... (page 10)
- 6.4 Change in Direction..... (page 11)



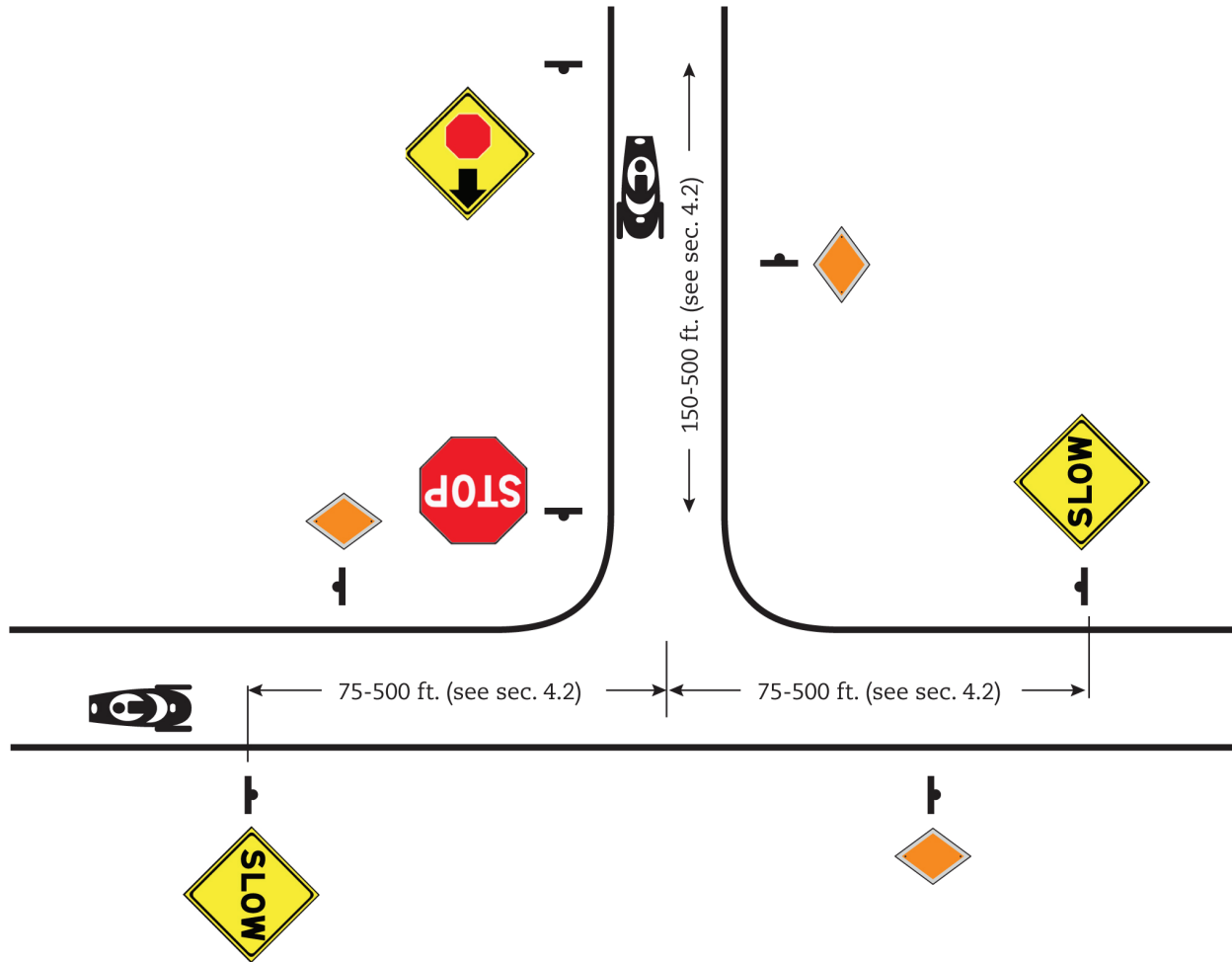
6.1 Road Crossing



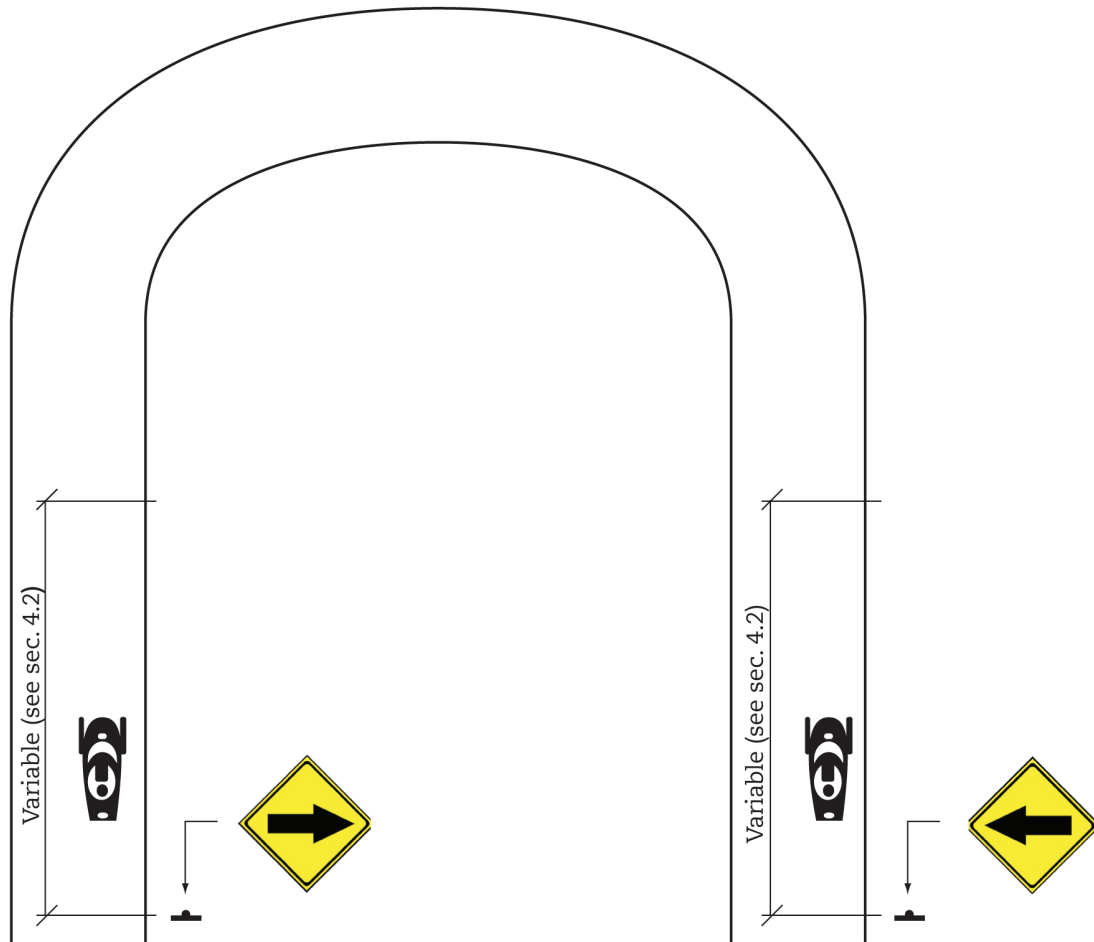
6.2 Bridge



6.3 Trail Intersection



6.4 Change in Direction



7.0 Corridor Setting

In forested areas, following the trail may be a fairly obvious and straightforward task. However, when trails cross fields, lakes, meadows or other cleared areas, trail routing may not be at all obvious. Relying on the groomed track for trail routing is not adequate since even a well-established trail can be quickly obscured by a heavy snow fall.

Both snowmobilers and groomer operators need continuous reference points to navigate the trail confidently. A simple method of identifying the trail corridor in open areas is to use stakes or poles that are mounted into the ground or snow adjacent to the trail.

7.1 Stakes/Poles

In areas where snow depths are low to moderate, a typical stake is a 2" x 2" (minimum) piece of inexpensive lumber sharpened at one end to allow for mounting in the ground. A minimum of 12" at the top of the stake is painted a color that offers high contrast to the background, e.g. blaze or fluorescent orange. This will make the stake more visible during the flat light conditions that can occur during daylight hours.

At least 3 square inches of reflective material should be attached on both sides of the stake at a point 4" down from the top of the stake. This will make the stake more visible at night from both directions of travel. The length of the stake is selected so that when it is driven into place, a minimum of 30" of stake remains visible above the top of the snow with the reflective material being as close to eye level as possible. Stake lengths in these snow conditions are typically 4', 5' or 6'.

Figure 4 shows a recommended configuration of an inexpensive wooden stake.

Stakes are driven into the snow or ground within the sign location window previously defined in figure 3. A commercial post driver is a simple and inexpensive tool that makes this task much easier.

In areas where snow depths are moderate to heavy (6'-12'+) it may not be practical to use stakes that are driven into the ground. Large seasonal snow depths may dictate the use of plastic fence posts, PVC tubing or similar commercially manufactured synthetic products that are mounted in the snowpack adjacent to the trail. The characteristics of contrasting color and reflectorization mentioned in the previous paragraphs apply. The major differences are the typical lengths of the material, 6'-12', and the necessity for inspection and occasional readjustment to reflect changes in snow depth.

Figure 4 - Stake Example

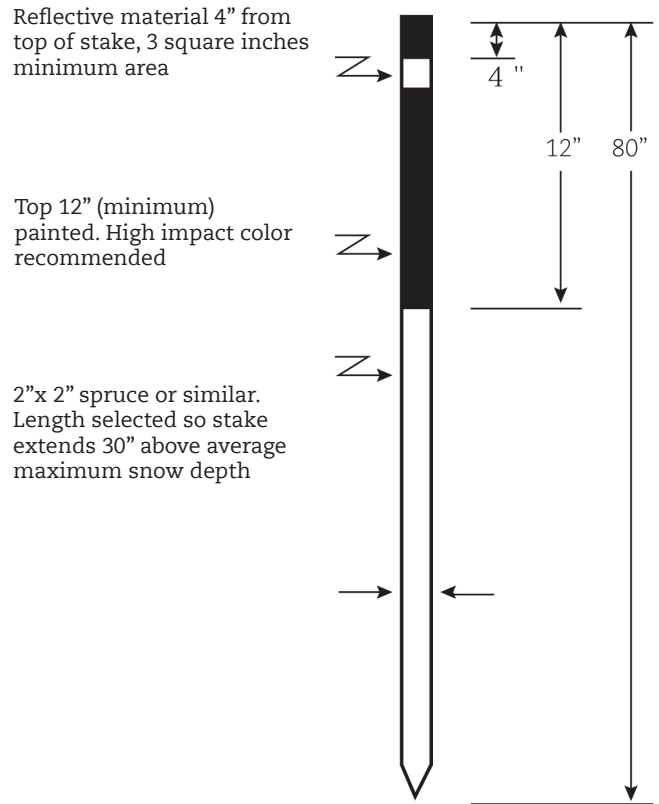


Figure 5 - Examples of Staking

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- Single Stake used to augment an existing fixed objects such as a fence post. Note the use of a blazer to provide a second reference point.
 - Standard two stake configuration leaves no doubt as to the intended trail routing.

7.2 Setting the Corridor

There are several generally accepted methods of establishing a corridor:

- a) placing stakes or poles in pairs at right angles to the trail to set a “gate” through which a snowmobiler passes through or alternating stakes/poles along the trail to set a general corridor of travel or,
- b) setting a single line of single stakes or poles with periodic pairs of stakes or poles to reinforce which side of the stake or pole line is intended for the flow of traffic.

In either case, the next stake/pole or stake/pole pair must be easily visible after passing by a stake/pole or stake/pole pair. This spacing will vary on the nature of the terrain being marked. The frequency of stake/pole sets should be increased significantly to indicate a turn, although if the turn is sharp, the signing requirements for curves discussed earlier should be used. Figure 5 illustrates these concepts on previous page.

8.0 Acknowledgements

This document consists of materials previously developed by the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators (IASA) and its Trails Committee, as well as materials developed by a number of other snowmobile trail operating organizations. We thank all of these individuals and groups for their contributions.



Updated graphics provided by State of NH Division of Parks and Recreation and Bureau of Trails.



9.0 North Dakota Signing Requirements

9.1 Sign Types:

There are three different types of signs which include regulatory, warning, and guide.

Regulatory Signs: inform of traffic laws and regulations

1. protect trail and resources;
2. ensure safety and enjoyment of users;
3. stress educational vs. restrictions;
4. keep on-trail signing to a minimum.

Warning Signs: alert users of upcoming riding conditions.

Guide Signs: provide guidance to and from destinations

1. identify all trail legs at all junctions;
2. sign destination until reached;
3. show distances with destinations;
4. it's recommended to place trail names and numbers on maps.

9.2 Always keep the following five items in mind when signing a trail:

1. poor weather and light conditions;
2. night use;
3. lack of tracks;
4. distances based on adverse conditions;
5. sign for individuals that have never rode the trail system before.

9.3 North Dakota Sign Inventory:

Regulatory Signs:



Stop Sign: Place stop signs at all highway crossings. If there is a highway department stop already in place no additional sign is needed.



Yield Ahead: Place yield signs at all less traveled road crossings.

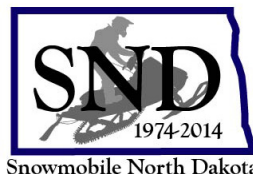


Arrows: Place an arrow at the start of each turn to show the direction of the trail.

Warning Signs:

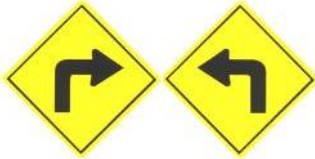


Blazers: Establish corridors to mark a safe trail and guide riders.





Keep Right: When crossing a steep approach or when you cannot see a sled coming from the opposite direction.



90-Degree Turn Arrows: Place a 90-degree turn arrow before the turn to show there is a turn ahead.



Chevrons: Place a minimum of three chevrons at the start of each sharp curve to show the direction of the trail.



Slow: Place slow signs to allow a safe stopping distance.



Trail Closed: These signs close sections of trails. The sign must be placed at the start of the section of trail which is closed. If there is more than one starting section, both sections must be marked.



Trail Temporarily Closed: These signs are only to be used when a portion of the trail or the whole trail is closed temporarily.



Trail Ends: In instances where the trail has a dead-end, place a trail ends sign at the ending of the trail. Trail End signs can also be placed at city limits if a trail does not exist through town.



Stop Ahead Sign: Place stop ahead signs before all stop signs including highway department stop signs. If there is a highway department stop ahead sign already in place no additional sign is needed.



Stay on Trail: Place a stay on trail sign at the trailhead, one in each direction, and also at restricted areas.



Object Markers: Place these signs at unmarked bridges and gates to show safe passage for the snowmobile users.



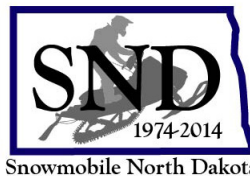
No Snowmobiling: Place these signs in areas along the trail system where no snowmobiling is allowed.



No Wheeled Vehicles and Snowmobiles Only: If the trail system is having a problem with wheeled vehicles and ATV's utilizing the snowmobile trails, place either of these signs within that particular section of trail.



You Are Here: Place at intersections.



9.4 North Dakota Snowmobile Trail Program Sign Requirements

1. **Benchmark Funding Signing Requirements:** At least 80% of each Trail Association's signs must be posted by December 15th, in order to be eligible for the First Benchmark Funding Program. The remaining 20% must be posted before the association can enter the second benchmark within the funding program. All signs must be down before the association is eligible to receive funding in the third benchmark.
2. **Buried Signs:** If signs become buried the association must resign the trail. Trail blazers attached to lathe can be used to remark the trail. Please remark the trail per the trail programs guidelines.
3. **City Limits:** Some communities connected to the state snowmobile trail system do not allow snowmobile trails to exist in town. Post a **Trail Ends** sign at the city limits to inform snowmobile traffic they are no longer on the state trail system. This informs the user the trail stops so they do not become frustrated with the lack of signing.
4. **DOT Standards: Signs are to not be posted on DOT sign standards, as well as city or county sign standards.** This rule is strictly enforced and if it is not complied with, loss of funding could occur.
 - a. Exception: If the governing land manager requires the signs be placed on existing sign standards, the trail association must obtain a letter of approval to post signs on the existing sign standards. This exception does not apply to Department of Transportation sign standards.
5. **Hazards:** Report any safety hazards immediately to SNDTP. Immediately reroute the trail around the hazard using the sign corridor method until further repair can be completed on the hazard.

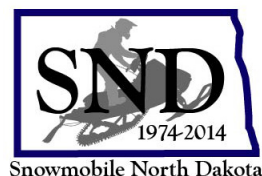
Emergency Trail Closing: if the safe corridor signing method can't be used to detour traffic around the hazard, the trail must be closed. Place Trail Temporarily Closed Signs at the head of the trail where the hazard exists. If there are multiple trailheads into the location, mark each trailhead location. These signs can be removed once the hazard is removed or repaired.

6. **Public Right-of-Ways:** If the trail system is located in a public right-of-way (ditch), the trail signs must be located within the right of way of any public roadway. If the public right-of-way is not wide enough for this task, a snowmobile land use agreement must be acquired with the property owner in order to locate the trail along the public roadway.

Right-of-Way Plats: The ND DOT has the right-of-way plats located on the GIS Hub. For more information please visit the ND DOT website:

<http://www.dot.nd.gov/business/gis-mapping.htm>

7. **Sign Corridor:** When signing a snowmobile trail always remember to sign a safe passage for travel for snowmobile users. **DO NOT MARK HAZARDS.** A minimum of two blazers are required to sign the corridor, including on approaches. The two blazers must be visible from the opposite side of the approach. If the Trail Inspector determines they are not visible from the opposite side, the association will be notified to add blazers to the approach. Please remember trail associations receive points for trail signing; using correct signing methods will receive higher points to earn additional funding.
8. **Sign Installation:** Signs can be placed on the snowmobile trail from October 1st to April 30th of each year.



Year Round Signage: Long-term signage placed on the snowmobile trail system from October 1st to September 30th. Year Round Signage eases volunteer time to maintain the trail system. Please refer to the following requirements for year round signage:

- a. Signs may be left up all year round in wooded areas.
- b. If the landowner provided approval on the snowmobile land use agreement.
- c. Not allowed where visible from communities or near high traffic roadways.

Year Round Signage on Permanent Posts: Fencing, utility/power line poles and trees are considered permanent posts. If the following requirements are met, long-term signage can be placed on permanent posts on the snowmobile trail system from October 1st to September 30th.

- a. If the owner provided approval on the snowmobile land use agreement.
 - b. Regulatory, warning and guide signs cannot be placed on permanent posts. **Only assurance (trail) blazers can be installed on permanent posts.**
 - c. Year round signage on permanent posts is allowed for a maximum of five miles.
 - d. The permanent post method cannot be used where trails turn or direct traffic onto private property.
9. **Sign Orders:** Sign order forms must be completed and submitted by the trail association by **April 30th** of each year. If the deadline is missed, the trail association is responsible for purchasing its own signs for the upcoming winter season. The trail signs must be purchased from the same vendor which the snowmobile trail program used to purchase the signs, so all trail signs will be alike throughout the trail system.
10. **Sign Orientation:** Signs may not be cut in half and used to mark the snowmobile trail. This is considered tampering with the trail sign and could result in a fine.
11. **Sign Posts:** The standard sign posts used across the state are rolled rod rebar posts, heavy duty u-posts and snowpoles. These styles are not a requirement, however, it is recommended to stay away from lathe. Since the snowmobile trail program is purchasing heavier signs the lathe is no longer strong enough to hold the signs.
12. **Signing for Opened & Closed Trails:** Open and Close the trail with proper signing when conditions and leases dictate. When the trail is closed due to lack of snow, a Trail Closed sign must be placed at all trailheads. If a trail is closed due to debris on the trail but will reopen a Trail Temporarily Closed sign can be used.
13. **Trail Grubbing Equipment:** Trail grubbing equipment has been placed around the state to assist the clubs with posting and removal of signs. Please refer to the Trail Program Guidelines for additional information on the equipment.
- ND Forest Service/ND Parks & Rec. Dept. (Walhalla):** 2001 Polaris Ranger, 2011 Kunz Mower, 2011 Triton Utility Trailer, and a 2007 Beartrack Utility Trailer.
- Ft. Ransom State Park:** 2009 Polaris Ranger, 2007 Kunz Mower, and a 2007 Beartrack Utility Trailer.
- Headquarters (Bismarck):** 2007 Polaris 700 ATV and a 2007 Beartrack Utility Trailer.
- Trail Clearing Assistance:** a NDPRD trail clearing assistance program available to trail associations to help with brush cutting and tree trimming tasks. Requests are to be submitted in writing to SNDTP by June 30th.
14. **Trailheads:** Designate a trail head within the trail association's trail system and record it with the SNDTP office.



15. **Trail Inspection Compliance:** All trail associations must comply with the Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signing & Placement handbook and the snowmobile trail programs requirements before the trail system can be opened for the season. The snowmobile trail program annually hires a Trail Maintenance Inspector to check signing in the trail systems during the season. Each trail association receives a report after the inspection reflecting sections of trail that need to be changed so they meet the signing requirements. Inspection reports are provided within a week of inspection to the trail association's Trail Coordinator and the clubs involved with the association. Signing changes must take place within two weeks from the postmarked date on the inspection report. **If all the items reflected on the trail inspection report are not addressed, the following penalties will be enforced:**
- The trail association will assume the costs of the second trail inspection out of the association's second benchmark. The average cost per inspection is \$250.
 - The trail inspection information will be forwarded to the Trails Committee for further penalties.
 - Correct signing methods receive higher points in the Trail Funding Program which means additional funding.
16. **Two-Way Traffic:** All trails maintained by the state snowmobile trail program are to be a minimum of ten feet wide to allow for two-way snowmobile traffic. This requirement also exists for snowmobile trails existing in right-of-ways.

Additional Information:

- ND law states in times that require the use of lights of travel, you must travel in the same direction as other motor vehicles on the same side of the right-of-way. Encouraged snowmobile trails existing within a right-of-way of any road, street, or highway that are maintained by the NDPRD are exempt from this rule.
 - The state snowmobile trail program requires trail associations to contact county, township, or city commissioners when placing a state snowmobile trail in a right-of-way. Snowmobiles are allowed to operate in right-of-ways but to establish good communication with the land managers, this communication is required.
 - If one-way traffic is required and the trail system does not make a loop, please acquire approval from the county, township or city commissioners to locate the trail system in both sides of the right-of-way following the county road or highway. Also, one-way traffic signs must be purchased from the trail associations sign budget to place along the trail.
17. **Utility/Power Line Poles:** If year round signage requirements are met, signs can be permanently installed on utility/power line poles if a snowmobile land use agreement exists between the NDPRD and the utility/power line company.

Guy Wires:

- Make sure all guy wires for the utility/power line poles are marked before opening the trail system. The company which owns the poles will provide covers for the guide wires.
- Trails cannot travel between the guy wire and pole.**
 - Over 10 Feet:** If there is enough room for a minimum 10 foot wide trail next to the guy wire, use the sign corridor method.
 - Under 10 Feet:** If space next to the guide wire is less than 10 feet, use chevrons in a set of three to push snowmobile traffic away from the guy wire.
 - If a trail system signs the trail between the guy wire and pole, **the trail system will be automatically closed** until the trail is signed correctly using one of the two options above.

Trail signing is checked periodically throughout the snowmobile season. Please comply with the above standards, otherwise trail closure or loss of funding according to the Benchmark Funding Program penalties or SNDTP reprimands could occur.

