

# A Native Fish and Riparian Zone Interpretive and Educational Sign Project

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Outdoor educational and interpretive signs about native fishes and the functions of riparian zones (streamside forests)—like one I recently created for the Mahoning River in Warren, Ohio—can serve many functions.

First, these displays can be placed along rivers, streams, and nature trails in your community's public parks, nature trails, etc., where many people will stop and read them. These signs help educate people about their local river's animals and habitats, and help them appreciate the natural and important aspects of areas that have streams running through them.

Many city parks have beautiful river and riparian zone areas, but no way to help people understand and appreciate the value of these areas. Instead, people are more concerned about baseball and soccer fields. Interpretive signs remind everyone of the wonderful little secrets of nature that lie right beneath their feet, or just a stone's throw away. I have seen interpretive signs in parks before, but I've never seen one focusing on aquatic life, especially native nongame fishes. This was what inspired me to create my own interpretive sign. I also wanted to encourage more appreciation for local fauna.

Second, these interpretive displays can serve as a tool for school teachers. While a science teacher may be teaching in a school that is close to a stream or river, chances are he or she is already using that river or stream as an outdoor environmental lab. Having an interpretive sign in the area of study can serve as a reference tool for information about the river, as well as a spot where students can view illustrations of the aquatic creatures they may be collecting in the stream. Topics on my display cover everything from improving water quality with streamside forest, appreciating and maintaining wildlife populations, and how healthy streamside forests play a key factor in the quality of life *and* a healthy economy. Creating

such a display can also make for a wonderful classroom project. There are various grants available in your local area to fund such projects. That's how I was able to do get the money to get my sign project started.

Finally, such an educational display is relatively easy to make. In fact, you can use my sign as a template and simply customize it to your stream and its particular fishes. Call or write me and I'll show you how to do it! You can see my 34" x 68" sign, complete with text and sign structure examples, on NANFA's website at:

[www.nanfa.org/education/carillio/sign.htm](http://www.nanfa.org/education/carillio/sign.htm)

You may also want to get in touch with a local elected official and explain exactly what it is you want to do. They may help you a great deal, especially if it is election time! Groups that could also possibly help spearhead and even fund such a project are your Local Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, Boy Scouts of America, church youth groups, local conservation clubs, and even state agencies involved with management of natural resources. (In my case, that was the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.) These agencies may even have small grants available to the public for this kind of project.

Furthermore, NANFA has just implemented an education grant program to help fund such projects (see facing article). I am both honored and delighted that my project was the first to receive some of these monies; late last year, NANFA's Board of Directors awarded me \$400 to apply towards the sign.

I encourage people who are looking for an environmental education project to consider a native fish and riparian zone interpretive and educational sign. Such a sign will show many people the significance of our native fishes and their habitats, how they play very important roles in our everyday lives, and how losing them is costly to all of us in so many ways! 