

WABASH HERITAGE TRAIL: HOME TO FIRST TRAIL ACCESS INFORMATION SIGNS IN INDIANA AND MIDWEST

West Lafayette leading the way for ADA-compliant trail signage nationwide

West Lafayette, IN – October 4, 2013 – In a first for Indiana, visitors to West Lafayette’s part of the Wabash Heritage Trail in Happy Hollow Park now can find out all types of information about the Parks’ trails before they even step foot on them, thanks to the recent installment of Trail Access Information signs.

According to West Lafayette Parks & Recreation Superintendent Joe Payne, the “strip-style” signs posted on the trailhead signs throughout the four miles of trails tying together the City’s river corridor are designed to resemble a food facts nutrition label, with items such as the length, surface, elevation, tread width and cross slope provided for each trail segment.

“These TAI signs will provide trail users – particularly those on the more challenging segments in Happy Hollow Park – with all kinds of helpful information for them to then decide if they can handle the conditions of each trail segment. Because we believe these signs will help walkers and hikers make smart choices based on their own physical strength or limitations, we also hope the signs will be a tool to help decrease injuries and lower the number of first responder calls. We hope future technology ultimately may help emergency responders locate an injured person on our trails.

“We want our parks to be accessible to every West Lafayette resident and visitor. These signs provide those with physical challenges, whether they are in wheelchairs or dealing with arthritis or asthma, the necessary and important details to make critical choices about their recreational options,” Payne said.

The Parks and Recreation Department’s ADA compliance progress is part of the City’s overall mission to make all City facilities ADA-compliant.

“In West Lafayette, we always are proud to be ‘trailblazers.’ The valuable information these new signs provide mean increased accessibility and hopefully, increased safety and greater use of and enjoyment from our many trails for all park visitors. We are excited to be leading the charge not only in Indiana, but in the Midwest with these signs that soon will be a requirement for trails nationwide,” Mayor John Dennis said.

West Lafayette officials in partnership with ADA Consultants of Indiana are using High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP) software to “read” information on trails as narrow as 12 inches wide. The scope of HETAP’s measurements include flat or steep terrain, steps and various trail obstructions, including rocks, roots and ruts.

Positioned on a rolling or wheeled cart pushed by a human operator, a Wheeled Instrument Sensor Package (WISP) program takes a recording and photo of the exact trail location with real time data and stores it. The information is transferrable to any GIS location. The WISP operator can average four miles per day (with fresh data collected approximately every seven steps), compared to three people manually gathering data who typically can only cover 1.5 miles per day.

According to ADA Consultants of Indiana Principle Consultant David Meihls, federal trails in the Western U.S. are on board with TAI signs, including those in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, and California.

“The Universal Trail Assessment Process has been adopted by the U.S. Forest Service and will be required throughout the country in the future. The future already is here in West Lafayette, thanks to City officials’ proactive trail work.

“While it’s impossible to know what information is going to be helpful to any one individual interested in West Lafayette’s trails, we do know the specifics provided on the City’s TAI signage will help a variety of general needs for those with disabilities. Any city officials interested in becoming ADA compliant with their recreational amenities would be smart to ask their West Lafayette counterparts where they started,” Meihls said.

The TAI signs include a Quick Response (QR) code that when scanned into mobile phones brings up West Lafayette's Parks & Recreation Trail Guide for easy reference. New TAI signs will be installed next spring on the Cattail and Northwest Greenway Trails.

West Lafayette boasts more than 19 miles of paved trails and five miles of footpaths. Happy Hollow Park stretches from Happy Hollow Road (IN 443) to Salisbury Street. An up-to-date West Lafayette Trails Guide will be available by spring, both in hard copy and on the City's Web site: www.westlafayette.in.gov

An informational brochure and map of the entire 17-mile Wabash Heritage Trail network between Tippecanoe Battlefield and Fort Ouiatenon is available at:

<http://www.homeofpurdue.com/pdfs/2011wabashtrailbrochure.pdf>

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For questions or interview requests, contact Superintendent Payne at 765-775-5110.

NOTE: please see the attached two photos showing a close up of a TAI sign and City Parks staff and ADA consultants with a posted sign and the WISP cart/stroller nearby.