

Byways For Everyone:

MAKING SURE YOUR BYWAY IS ACCESSIBLE



TELE-WORKSHOP SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER

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Speaker Profile:

Working in the field of accessibility since the mid-1980s, Janet Zeller became involved with the

development and implementation of the Forest Service accessibility programs and policies in 1991. She is currently the National Accessibility Program Manager for the USDA Forest Service and serves on the Washington Office Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Resources staff. Janet represents the Forest Service, working on accessibility issues with organizations, state and other federal agencies. She also instructs accessibility and universal design of programs and facilities at a wide range of training sessions nationally. The National Scenic Byways Conferences in Portland and Albuquerque featured Janet's presentations on accessibility.

THE ACCESSIBILITY DISCUSSION

Accessibility ensures all visitors can experience and enjoy your Byway, and Janet Zeller from the USDA Forest Service offered insights to planning, designing and implementing accessible programs, facilities and interpretive materials.

Specifically, she addressed:

- Accessibility and the law
- Universal design
- Program accessibility
- Print media criteria

Prior to the Tele-Workshop event, Janet asked that participants read the article appearing in the March/April *Vistas* newsletter on Byway accessibility, and bring questions and discussion points to the conference call.

"I'm incredibly excited about Byways and the opportunities they offer everyone," Janet said. Her familiarity with National Scenic Byways encouraged participants to ask a variety of specific questions. The discussion described in this Fact Sheet augments the information presented in the *Vistas* article; the America's Byways Resource Center recommends that you read both for a broader understanding of accessibility issues.

"I'm incredibly excited about Byways and the opportunities they offer everyone."

– Janet Zeller, USDA Forest Service, National Accessibility Program Manager



TERMINOLOGY:

Terminology is important. The two terms most commonly used—correctly and incorrectly—to describe a person who has a limitation are handicapped and disabled. Consider what the words mean:

Disability: A medically definable condition that causes a limitation.

Handicap: A barrier, such as steps in a pathway that handicap the progress down the path of a person using a wheelchair. The term *handicapped* has a negative connotation for many people. Some are highly offended by the use of the term *handicapped* when it is used to refer to people. Let's not offend visitors.

In 1990, the Americans With Disabilities Act settled the terminology question. It uses only the terms *persons with disability* and *accessible*.

Accessible: The parking, facility or site is fully in compliance with the accessibility guidelines.

So "handicap accessible" means "barrier/no barrier," which makes no sense. A facility or site is either in compliance with the guidelines and therefore is accessible, or it is not accessible. There are no shades of that term. You can also say too much. For example, "an accessible walkway for people with disabilities" is redundant. If it's accessible, all people can use it. Simply say it is an "accessible walkway."

We want volunteers at sites to send the right messages and use the right terms. At the same time, I'm a little concerned that we sound like we're asking them to learn a new vocabulary. We want volunteers to find a comfort level to speak easily to all people, including those of us who have disabilities. Keep it simple. Remember that the person is always more important than the disability. Put the person first, the disability second—that's the simple rule: *A person who is blind*—not *a blind person*. It is *people who use wheelchairs*, not *wheelchair people*. And share with your volunteers the "Tips for Interacting with Persons with Disabilities" (below)!

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TIPS For Interacting With Persons With Disabilities

- Remember that people are still people, despite a wide range of abilities.
- Relax.
- Look directly at the person. Maintain eye contact if the individual appears comfortable maintaining eye contact.
- When having a long conversation with a person who is in a wheelchair, stoop down or sit nearby so that you are closer to the same eye level.
- Do not lean on or use a person's wheelchair, crutches, etc., without the person's permission.
- Ask first if assistance is needed. Do not assume that assistance is needed or wanted.
- Speak as you would normally. For example, if speaking to a person who has a mobility impairment, you do not need to avoid words like "run" or "walk," and to a person who is blind to say "see you."
- When speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, be sure she/he has a clear view of your mouth. Keep hands, food, etc., away from your mouth while you are speaking. Ideally, mustaches should be cut short in order for the upper lip to be seen clearly.
- If your conversation is being interpreted by a sign language interpreter, speak to and look at the person to whom you are speaking—not the interpreter.
- When speaking to a person who has a visual impairment, be sure to introduce yourself by name. Use the clock method to assist the person in locating or avoiding something. The clock method uses the numbers of the clock for reference points: straight in front of the person is 12:00, directly behind is 6:00.
- Don't shout.

Q & A

QUESTIONS ABOUT SIGNAGE

Q: If you have a wayside exhibit with signage placed at the right height for accessibility, do you need a mat or some sort of layer over the dirt?

JANET: The law doesn't require a "hardened" material, such as cement or asphalt. Instead the law says it must be a firm and stable surface. You mentioned the height of the signage, but have you checked to see if a person can get within two inches of the sign? People with vision impairments may need to get that close. Be sure the base of the sign is designed to allow up-close access to the sign and does not prevent people from moving close to the sign.

Q: Regarding the 36-inch to 48-inch centerline height on signage, it's very difficult to get people up close to large, vertical interpretive signs. These signs don't allow for a low centerline height. Is a sideways approach acceptable?

JANET: Yes, and the *Vistas* article shows a photo from Camp Round Lake with a person viewing from a side approach. Size of the font adjusts as the sign increases too, so that influences the sign accessibility. The 3-30-3 rule as described in the book *Signs, Trails and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places* by Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman and explained in the *Vistas* article is a good benchmark.

Q: What about putting Braille on signs?

JANET: Of the 11 million people who are blind or have low vision, about 5 percent are actually blind, and only 5 percent of those people who are blind read Braille. You're providing a service to a very, very small audience. Consider offering audio descriptions of your trail or tour instead, so the person who is blind or has a low level of vision can experience your site.

Ray Bloomer, Director of Education and Technical Assistance at the National Center on Accessibility (sponsored by the National Park Service) at Indiana State University, added, "The space that Braille takes up on a sign often makes it unwieldy. However, maps can use identification that helps promote independent understanding."

Janet agreed. Make maps, that are part of an exhibit, tactile. Everyone loves tactile maps, not just those people with low vision or who are blind. Tactile maps help your area come to life. You could use Braille in the legend of a tactile map.

QUESTIONS ABOUT TRAILS AND GUIDELINES

Q: Does a trail need to have raised curbing?

JANET: There is no requirement for curbing in the accessibility guidelines. The use of curbing along a pathway is a design decision, not an accessibility requirement. Tactile change is more important than curbing. Think of a person who has low vision or is blind using a cane. That person sweeps the cane side to side in front of him or her while walking. "Caning" helps the person discern what he or she is walking toward and the change in surface texture at edges of the cane's sweep signals a border of the walking area. Along a trail or walkway, the duff, grass, etc., that occurs beyond the edge of the walking area creates the surface change.

Also, while curbing can provide a solid guide for a person with limited vision, it is restrictive to others, such as people using wheelchairs or walkers. Curbing prevents people from moving off the trail and exploring—which may be the opposite of what you would really like them to do. You may want them to take a break along the trail and enjoy the sights, sounds and other experiences there. Where people are required to stay on the pathway, in areas where the adjacent environment is fragile, etc., a curbing might be designed along the walkway to encourage walkers to stay on the path. However, even the Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines do not require that curbing be used. If curbing is used along a pathway, it is to be a minimum of three inches in height.

Q: The USDA Forest Service uses waterbars and other erosion-control methods, especially on long-distance trails. Isn't this a problem?

JANET: Yes, but there has to be a balance between the trail being accessible and the trail washing away. Janet shared that erosion control is an important factor in trail design. Ray Bloomer added that drainage dips serve as an erosion-control tool by directing the flow of water as do the rubber "flapper" bars that press down when stepped upon. One Byway participant on the Tele-Workshop suggested using French drains as another option. Janet agreed that there are many options, including rip rap or drainage rock and geo-textiles. Janet added that drainage dips are addressed in the Forest Service accessibility guidelines.

Q: Does the USDA Forest Service offer guidelines for trails?

JANET: The USDA Forest Service has Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) for hiker/pedestrian trails, which are routes used for the purpose of recreational hiking. Also the Forest Service's Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (FSORAG) addresses the outdoor recreation access routes that connect parking lots to campsites, to the picnic tables in picnic areas, etc. Interpretive trails fall within these two guidelines. If it is a highly developed area with interpretive panels and so forth, the FSORAG provides the guidelines for those types of areas. The Forest Service guidelines are finalizing through the Federal Register for use within National Forest System boundaries. The Access Board is following up with the development of similar guidelines for all Federal agencies and activities funded by Federal agencies. These guidelines aren't in place yet. To get a copy of both guidelines, go to the Forest Service accessibility home page on the Web at www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility.

Q: Will the Universal Access Guides be updated?

JANET: In April 2000, the USDA Forest Service stopped using the accessibility guidebook *Universal Access to Outdoor Recreation: A Design Guide*, which they had written in the early 1990s, because the accessibility guidelines are changing. The Forest Service is developing a new guidebook, *Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails*, under funding from FHWA. This new guidebook will be out in 2005 with user-friendly text and more helpful information about when to apply which accessibility guidelines, but also continuing the strong Forest Service commitment to universal design. When published, this guidebook will be available in hard copy and will also be available through both the Forest Service and FHWA Web sites.

Q: What are the differences, if any, in the regulations between agencies?

JANET: Different agencies may move forward with different approaches, but the legal requirements are still the same for all, as described in the *Vistas* article. For Federal agencies, and those entities expending funding from Federal agencies, the 1968 Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) requires that all facilities must be accessible. At the same time, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that Federal agency programs and facilities be accessible to people with disabilities; similarly, programs and activities that are developed or operated through funds from a Federal agency must also be accessible to people with disabilities. Even if no Federal agency dollars are involved in the facility or program, State and local governments and businesses that are open to the public are required, under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to ensure their programs and any new facilities are accessible.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURES

Q: Who determines accessibility in historic structures?

JANET: The State Historic Preservation Officer, or SHPO (pronounced: ship-oh), makes the final decision whether retrofitting a historic structure facility to provide accessibility would create a "substantial impairment" to a historic structure. If it is decided that it is not possible to provide physical access, you are still required to provide access to the program. A program is the reason the person visits the area: what that visitor is trying to experience. An integrated setting is best. The *Vistas* article references a lighthouse as a good example of a historic structure that might be substantially impaired by retrofitting for accessibility. However, interpretive panels along accessible walkways at the base of the lighthouse explain life in the lighthouse, its construction and reveal the view from the top.

One Byway participant recalled a historic site that had an inaccessible viewing platform but used a periscope at ground level to share an accessible viewing experience. Janet commented that the periscope idea is especially useful for experiences where the view changes, such as at a wildlife preserve, etc.

Q: In order to know costs and raise enough funding to renovate an existing facility, how much of the structure should we expect to change?

JANET: The accessibility guidelines are pretty reasonable. Make changes within the guidelines for the area you're planning to renovate or construct. If not available in the current structure, an addition to a building may trigger the inclusion of accessible restrooms, and route of travel through the addition to the existing structure. There are no all-encompassing triggers—for example, if the windows are the only portions of the structure being replaced, that work would not trigger a requirement to bring the entire facility into compliance with the accessibility regulations. However, if the facility is funded by Federal dollars, it is to be under an accessibility transition plan that states what work needs to be done to make that facility accessible, and when that work will be completed.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY BEYOND MOBILITY

Q: Most people seem to perceive "accessible" as addressing mobility disabilities. Does accessibility also include other disabilities?

JANET: The accessibility laws (ABA, ADA, Section 504) require access for people with the full range of disabilities. However, the accessibility guidelines—Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) and Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)—deal with physical structures (both are available on the Forest

Service Web site). Because of this, they are heavily geared toward the footprint of the wheelchair, because it is thought that if a person using a wheelchair can enter a building and participate in the activities and areas inside the building, all other people can physically manage in that building. The guidelines also include the physical considerations for people with sensory impairments: visual alarms on smoke detectors and Braille designation on permanent room signs.

For people whose disability involves their vision, hearing or ability to think, the design of the program, rather than the building, is critical. The *Vistas* article referenced four questions to ask about each aspect of your program, materials, exhibits, sites and facilities. If the answer to all four questions is “yes,” then the program is accessible. If the answer is “no” in some aspect, you’ll know what and where you need to improve. Janet commented on the four questions:

1. *Can a person who has a mobility impairment access and participate in the program or exhibit along with everyone else?*
The accessible guidelines (UFAS and ADAAG) address this. Look at the route of travel. Can people get close to signs and exhibits? Can they operate controls with one closed fist, which is equal to about five pounds of force? And so forth, as suggested in the guidelines.
2. *Can a person who is blind or has low vision access and participate in the program or exhibit along with everyone else?*
Can they get your program’s messages?
3. *Can a person who is deaf or hard of hearing access and participate in the program or exhibit along with everyone else?*
Look for visually oriented solutions. Instead of a closed-caption video program, offer open-captioning. Far more people are hard of hearing than deaf, and they’re often hesitant to request the captioning be shown just for them. They’re not likely to identify themselves as needing assistance. Open-captioning helps all visitors.
4. *Can a person who has a learning disability access and participate in the program or exhibit along with everyone else?*
Use of graphics and photos can help to portray the message to all people, including children and individuals who don’t speak English.

Q: After a request, how much time do we have to arrange sign language interpreters for folks who are deaf?

JANET: For programs and presentations, you must provide sign language interpreters upon “prior notice,” which is defined by how long it takes to ensure that you can obtain the services of two qualified sign language interpreters at your location. In Washington, D.C., because the interpreters are so busy, they have to be scheduled 14 days in advance. In another area of the country, it might take 3 weeks. Check with your local registry of interpreters for the deaf—your local Independent Living Center can help you locate the registry. The reason for two interpreters? If the program is longer than one hour, the interpreters need to spell each other because it is extremely intensive work. Remember that sign language is as much a separate language as is any other such as French or English.

Printed information about any presentation that is made as part of your program such as a speaker, a tour with a tour guide, etc., should include a notice:

“A sign language interpreter will be provided on _____ days’ notice. Contact _____ (name) at _____ (phone/e-mail) to request that the interpretation be provided.”

NOTE: The first blank is to be filled in with the number of days of advance notice your local registry of interpreters has told you it needs to ensure that the registry can provide the interpreters you will need.

When a request is made, ask the person making the request what type of sign language the individual uses. Provide the type of interpretation that’s requested, most commonly American Sign Language or Signed English.

Many people will visit your site without prior planning and won’t be able to give you advance notice. However, they may contact you on the way back.

Describe all the accessible programs, exhibits, materials, facilities or sites that are available in your brochures and on your Web site. Tell people what accessible facilities or programming you offer so they can plan ahead.

MORE QUESTIONS?

Although there isn’t a “best practices” Web site for ideas about solving challenges to accessibility, many resources exist. Use the resources offered by the Forest Service on its accessibility Web site and take a look at the ADA Web site. You can also contact Janet via e-mail at jzeller@fs.fed.us.

RESOURCES

USDA Forest Service Accessibility

www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility

Americans with Disability Act

www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

March/April Vistas

www.bywaysonline.org

U.S. Access Board Accessibility Guidelines

www.access-board.gov

Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part 2: Best Practices Design Guide

www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/index.htm

For hard copies:

www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/trailpub.htm

Signs, Trails and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places

Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman

America's Byways Resource Center

provides information, connections and expertise that help build better byways. State coordinators, local groups, volunteers and organizations with ties to nationally designated scenic Byways look to us for hands-on assistance in planning, preserving, promoting and managing scenic Byways.

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