

1. Hi everyone, I'm Charlie and in my practicum, I characterized the north wetland at Luther Burbank Park and used that information to create conceptual interpretive signage for the wetlands at the park.
2. First, I will briefly talk about the location and history of the park.
3. The Park is in the northeast corner of Mercer Island in Lake Washington. It has two wetlands. I characterized the north wetland, and I believe Christie worked in the South Wetland. The north wetland has two units separated by a weir. I found that it was a Category 2 wetland because of its diversity of vegetation, hydroperiods, and proximity to polluting sources including extensive development in the area and pollution in Lake Washington.
4. The park is currently managed by the City of Mercer Island, which took over in 2002 and began restoring the wetlands and native vegetation, while focusing on recreation. Many things have happened over the past 150 years (and beyond), but the most major was when Lake Washington was lowered by 10 feet. This exposed the current wetlands to the air, and left the prior ones to die.
5. Alright, so, with all the possible ways to teach people these days, why did I choose signage? Digital tools like outdoor scavenger hunt apps or plant ID apps do let you make a more detailed and engaging experience, but they can also be very distracting. Phones get a lot of notifications that draw you away from being engaged in nature, and (take out phone) some studies have shown that even having a phone in your peripheral vision can distract from your ability to empathize with others.
 - a. Which is a shame, because nature can be a very healing place.
 - b. My goal with this project was to create signs that go beyond dry facts, and encourage people to explore their environments, ask themselves questions, and be grounded in nature without distraction.
 - c. There is some existing signage at the park, but it's limited to the shorelines.
6. I had some guiding values and principles while designing the signs
7. I took guidance from the Luther Burbank Park master plan and the National Park Service's interpretive principles. Together, it basically boils down to: Embrace natural systems and vegetation while relating to the visitor and asking provocative questions.
8. The design process is iterative, including observing the sight, brainstorming, writing the sign text, making sketches, doing the layout, getting feedback, and going back and repeating those steps. One important note is that every sign has a theme, which is a detailed sentence or two that guides the main purpose and design of the sign.
9. Without further ado— the signs. Just a reminder that these are conceptual, and I am not a professional artist.
10. In this first sign, I wanted to highlight a known pest. The theme is actually a quote from the Mercer Island website: "Luther Burbank Park is named after the famous horticulturist... He created the Himalayan blackberry— loved by some for its luscious fruit, despised by others for its invasiveness. Ironically, many of Luther Burbank Park's native vegetation are choke with Himalayan Blackberry bushes"
 - a. My thought here was to have some sort of sinister blackberry at the top, and then some fun alternative berries at the bottom— subtly highlighting biodiversity and the things we miss when an invasive plant runs amok. I also included snowberry

here with a little “no humans” icon so that people don’t just start eating berries willy nilly. In the middle I ask some questions like, “Can you see it here?” “Where do you see it growing?” “How many other types of plants do you think would have grown here?” The point is that these questions make people use their brains and actually look around for things.

11. This one is my favorite. A lot of signs out there will show a picture of plant, which can be kind of meaningless to someone who doesn’t know how to recognize them. I thought it would be cool to make a sign that gives some basic plant ID skills, and encourages people to look at plants in detail even if they don’t end up ID’ing it. A few years ago, if you asked me to describe a tree, I would have said, “I don’t know, green?” I think a sign like this would be a cool gateway. It also has an interactive component in a flip book of multiple sign pages.
12. Here it is, a little bigger.
13. This sign is a little more classic, focusing on three main statements: “Wetlands keep our water clean”, “Wetlands keep animals alive”, and “Wetlands give us stories to tell”. In each of these sections, I give a little bit of information and ask more questions like– can you think of trash in the road that might end up here? Did you see anything interesting today? And then here’s a little tip on what type of day to look for beavers, because in my experience people think those are pretty exciting.
14. This one is a little more conceptual and definitely needs aesthetic work. It’s sort of a guided experience through using your senses, meant to make you stop and actually appreciate where you are in nature. Some things are, take a deep breath, did you smell anything? Close your eyes and listen. Do you hear things rustling, or birds singing? Look at something small, like a leaf. Imagine this place in another season. And so on. The idea is to get people to notice things about the wetland on a lot of levels and think about how it changes.
15. There is still work to be done if I want to expand on this in the future!
16. The main missing crucial step is feedback. User research is really important in designing something– right now these signs are built largely on my own assumptions and interests, and they would probably change a lot after getting opinions, especially from people who aren’t wetland scientists. I also didn’t have time in this project to build meaningful relationships with relevant Tribes, in order to portray their history respectfully, even though that is a very important part of the land and our society. Obviously, some professional artwork would also be nice.
17. Questions or comments?