

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL

# MARKING GUIDE

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## Introduction

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT) is a congressionally designated trail spanning 3,100 miles along the spine of the Continental Divide across New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Montana.

The trail traverses a variety of landscapes and settings that influence which type of trail marker or trail sign to use. **Generally speaking the CDT should be signed at Road Crossings, Trailheads, Trail intersections, and along areas for reassurance, but when in doubt mark the trail.**

There are always exceptions, but we will review many of those in this Guide.

National scenic trails are trails designed by Congress to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the areas through which they pass.

Marking of trails in the National Trail System requires special emphasis to denote their uniqueness and special qualities.

## Purpose

This manual summarizes trail marking policy and best management practices to promote a consistent approach to marking the CDT. A well-marked trail will lead to enhanced visitor experiences for all CDT users.

## Goals

- Specify which types of CDT trail signage to use along the trail, at trailheads and road crossings.
- Provide guidance to Volunteers, Adopters, Agency Partners and other Trail Partners for comprehensive and uniform signing.
- Provide design specifications for all CDT Markers, signs, posts and cairns.

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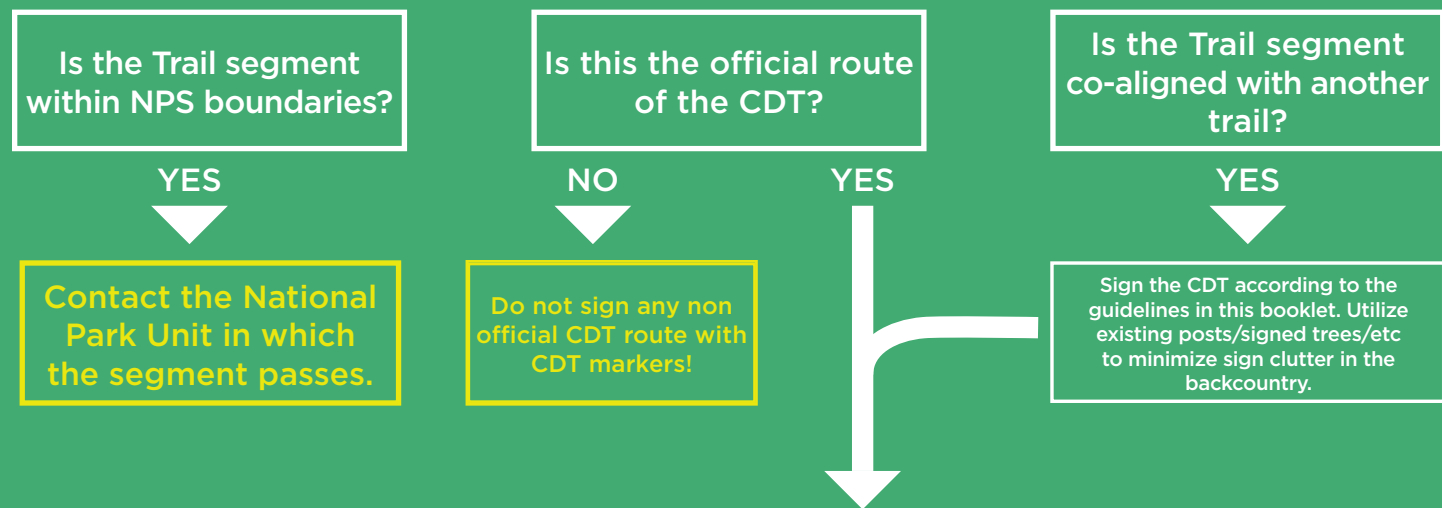
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# Before Marking the Trail

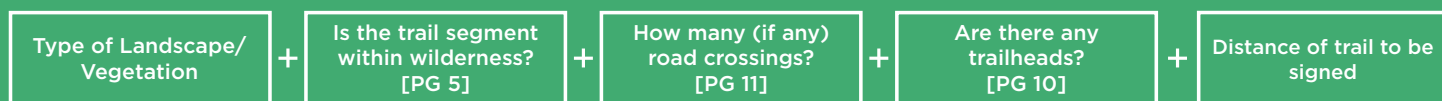


You must always coordinate with the land managing agency (BLM, USFS, NPS, etc.) before marking or signing the CDT!

The CDT is identified by CDT service-mark (at left). This symbol is registered by the US Forest Service and may only be used by express permission of the US Forest Service. This symbol may be used along the trail as a sticker on a carsonite post, a 3.5", 9" or 12" plastic or metal marker on trees, posts or trailhead signs, and may be routed or branded onto wooden posts and signs. This guide will help the agency determine which sign to use, and the best practices to sign the CDT once these have been determined.



## Things to consider



## Now you know



# 3.5" Markers

## When and Where to Use:

- Plastic or aluminum standard CDT marker for use **OUTSIDE** designated wilderness. Can be used on:
  - Wooden Posts
  - Nailed to Trees
- To identify the main pathway of the CDT to users in areas that might be confusing or in areas commonly affected by weather
- To keep users from deviating onto social trails, and to remain on the CDT
- To make a clear distinction between the CDT and other trails at common junctions and intersections



## How To Install:

### On a tree:

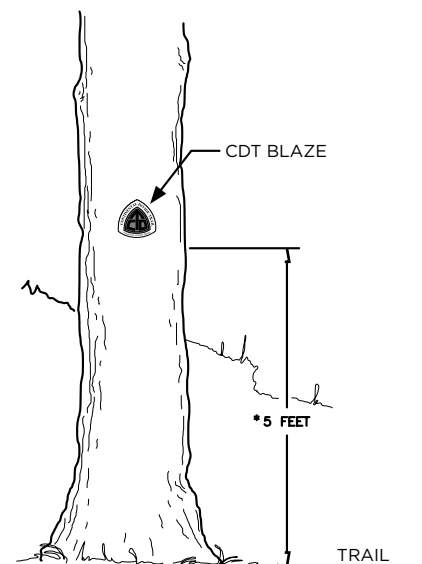
- Do not install on trees within NPS boundaries!
- Installed approximately 5-7 feet above the ground on both sides of the tree.
- Install with an inch of nail protruding to allow for tree growth
- Installed with the sign always facing in an upward direction on both sides of tree or post
- If using the aluminum signs you must use aluminum nails (1/8th inch) otherwise use 3 ring shank, eight-penny or larger, galvanized

### On a Post:

- Attach to top of a wooden post 3" from the top of the post facing both directions of the trail
- Installed with the sign always facing in an upward direction
- If using the aluminum signs you must use aluminum or galvanized (1/8th inch) ring shank, eight-penny or larger nails



**DO NOT orient marker to indicate direction!**



# Wood Markers

## When and Where to Use:

- Preferred marker for both inside and outside of wilderness. Can be routed, scorched, branded, or blackened.
- This is the only acceptable trail marker for use inside wilderness.



## How To Install:

- Installed approximately 5-7 feet above the ground on both sides of the tree or within the top 3" of the top of a wooden post, facing both directions of the trail
- Use in the same way as the 3.5 inch markers but in designated Wilderness Areas
- Use only official CDT Marker Brand on suggested no larger than 6 in x 8 inch piece of solid naturally appearing stained wood



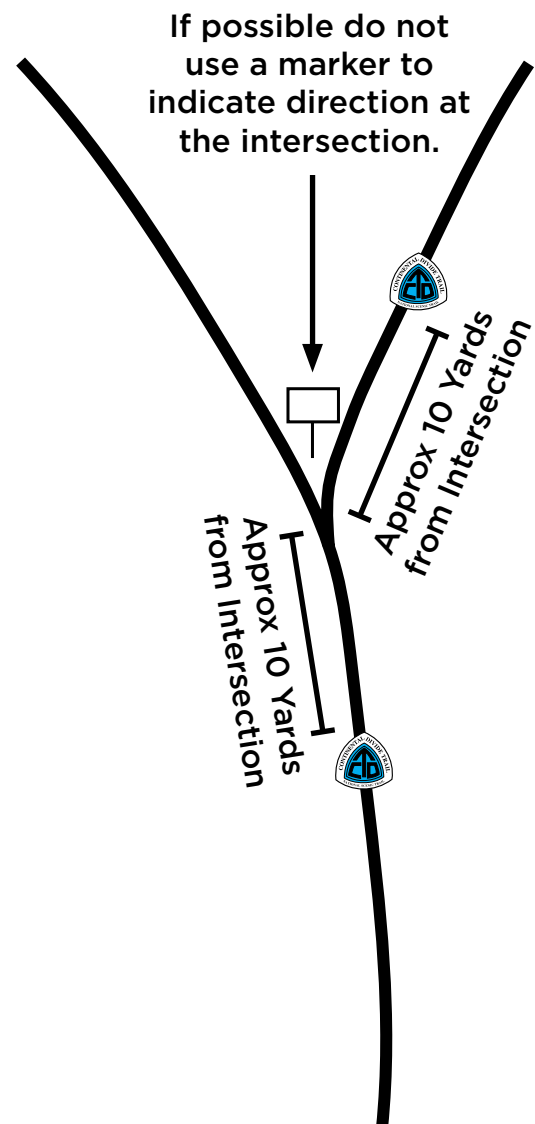
# Marking Intersections

## When and Where to Use:

- Intersections are often the most confusing part of marking the trail. This guide deals with trail **MARKERS** rather than **SIGNS**.

## How To Install:

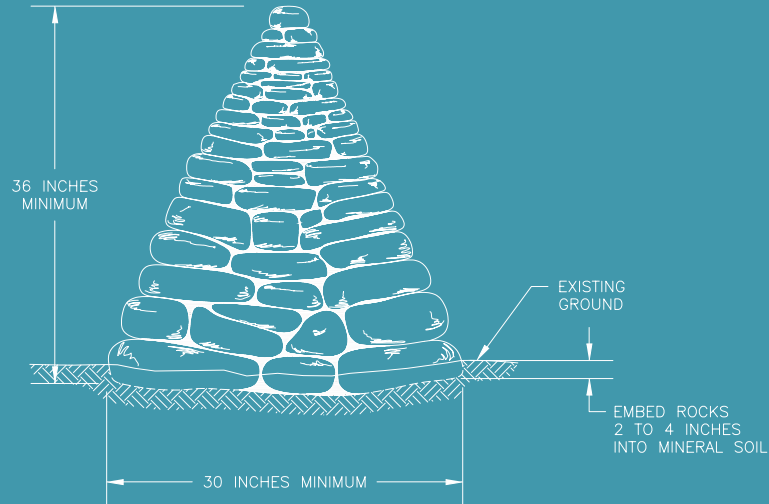
- Place appropriate marker type approximately 10 yards up and down trail from the actual intersection
- Ensure the markers can be seen from the intersection in both trail directions
- Placing markers in this manner allows trail users to be confident in the direction of the CDT
- All markers should be placed in areas visibly seen from the Trail in both directions



# Rock Cairns

## When and Where to Use:

- Construct in fields, balds and alpine areas where no trees or other natural objects on which to place markers are available.
- Can be used inside and outside wilderness, but must be cleared with local wilderness and land manager to protect against resource damage with the possibility of obtaining rocks from an archaeological site.



## How To Install:

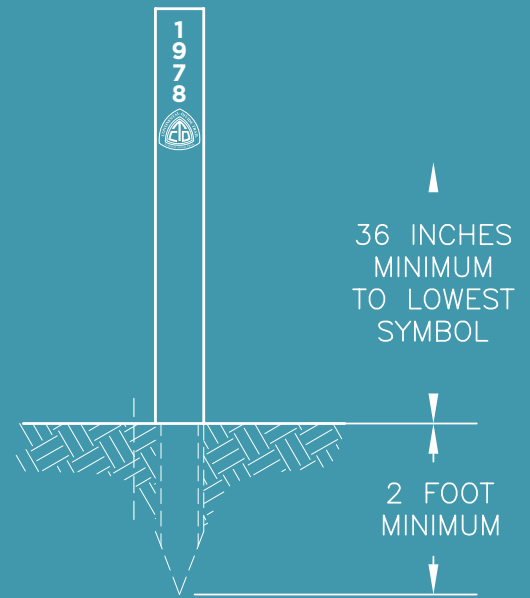
- Construct at least 3 feet tall, of flat stones stacked tightly in a pyramid formation with larger native stones used for the base



# Carsonite Posts

## When and Where to Use:

- Road crossings, trail junctions in areas of no trees, outside wilderness.
- Do not use in wilderness.
- Since the CDT has a designated logo, place the appropriate marker beneath the route identification number or letter. Follow ROS guidelines and the management direction established for the trail.



## How To Install:

- Use 4 inch wide Carsonite post installed with an optimum 4 feet above the ground
- Installed with at least 2 feet underground with well tamped backfill
- CDT Reflective Stickers installed on each side facing both directions of the trail
- Coordinate with agency on carsonite stickers.

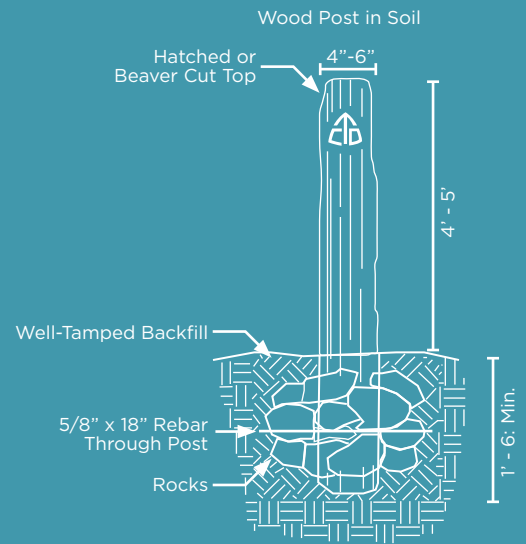




# Wooden Posts

## When and Where to Use:

- Construct in fields, balds and alpine areas where no trees or other natural objects on which to place markers are available.
- Can be used inside and outside wilderness, but must be cleared with local wilderness manager.
- Use should be consistent with ROS guidelines.



## How To Install:

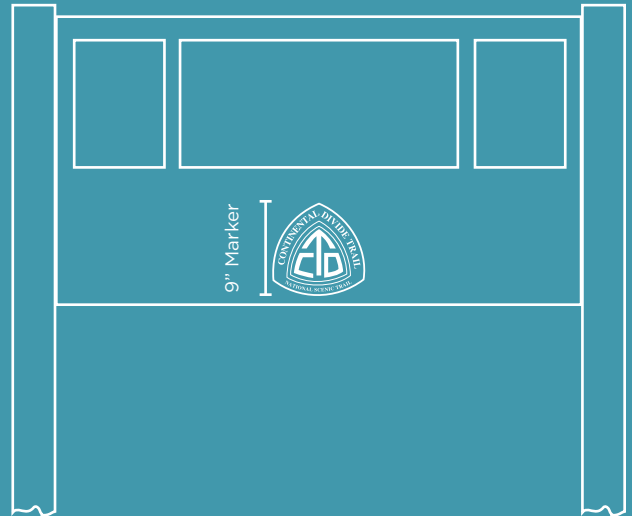
- Use natural appearing 4"x4" or round wooded post installed with an optimum 4-5 feet above the ground
- Install with at least 1.5 feet underground with well tamped backfill
- Although a wood routed marker is preferred, outside of wilderness a 3.5 inch marker may be used, installed within top 3 inches of post, on each side facing both directions of the trail
- Inside of wilderness, brand or router CDT mark directly to the post or attach a branded or routed board to both sides of the post.
- Routing out an indentation for the CDT marker is recommended



# Trailhead Signs

## When and Where to Use:

- 9 or 18 inch CDT Markers
- At trailheads or developed recreation sites associated with the trail, mount the 9-inch national trail marker on the base of the site identification sign or on a separate post in a prominent location.
- In the case where the Trailhead has a parking lot or can be seen from a road, the sign should also be visible to the motoring public



## How To Install:

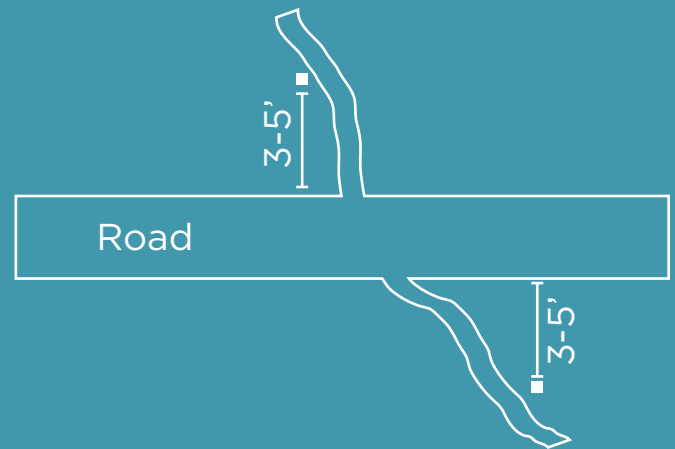
- Installed on a wooden post, kiosk or any wooden agency sign that makes sense and is large enough to accommodate the large marker. Preferably as close to where the trail enters area as possible.
- Installed with the sign always facing in an upward direction
- Use 3 eight-penny or larger, galvanized or aluminum ring shank nails



# Road Crossing Signs

## When and Where to Use:

- Placed in areas where a secondary road crosses perpendicular to the Trail
- Signs should be placed on each side of the road and both visible to the user and the motoring public
- All road crossings shall be coordinated with the governing road agency



Road crossing signs size will vary depending on the type of road.

## How To Install:

- Install outside of the right of way (ROW) of the roadway
- This guide only covers crossing secondary Forest Service or BLM road crossings. For crossing State or Federal highways coordination with the appropriate DOT is needed.
- Installed approximately 5-7 feet above the ground on both sides of the tree or within the top 3" of the top of a wooden post, facing both directions of the trail
- Installed with the sign always facing in an upward direction
- Use 3 eight-penny or larger, galvanized or aluminum, ring shank nails
- On a tree, install with an inch of nail protruding to allow for tree growth

# Practices To Avoid



Using other materials to mark the trail such as paint or a traditional cut blaze



Signs positioned as arrows, or the CDT marker to reflect a turn

- Using any other sign to mark the trail, other than the official CDT markers listed on this guide

# When to Remove or Replace

- Markers that have been defaced with paint, bullet holes, older cracked or faded or other damage
- Markers in areas that are not obviously seen from the Trail or road crossing
- Inadequately installed markers, too loose where they could easily fall off or too tight against trees not leaving any room for tree growth.

To get new markers please contact the CDTC:

Continental Divide Trail Coalition  
710 10th Street Suite 200  
Golden, CO 80401  
Phone: (303) 996-2759  
[info@continentaldivide-trail.org](mailto:info@continentaldivide-trail.org)



Notes:



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