

Enhancing the Visitor Experience with Interpretive Signage and Scientific Illustration

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Project Location: Great Hollow Nature Preserve
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INTRODUCTION

Interpretive signage can be an effective way of teaching visitors of nature preserves and other natural areas about local biodiversity and ecological processes so that they leave with an improved understanding and appreciation of nature. Scientific illustration, which graphically conveys a sign's message, is a key aspect of interpretive signage and can be a critical factor in whether or not a visitor stops to view a sign.

The goal of this project was to create engaging, educational signage for Great Hollow Nature Preserve that will teach visitors about some interesting aspects of the preserve's ecology. The signs feature original artwork and encourage visitors to learn about nature that surrounds them.

PROCESS

- In the Fall of 2020, I went to Great Hollow to brainstorm ideas with my community partner, and to find some inspiration from the scenery for the artwork.
- I was provided with some rough drafts for the text to go on the signage and some topic suggestions.
- I created artwork in the illustration program Krita and then added text after doing research on the topics.
- The final step is to have a sign maker produce the signs to be displayed along Great Hollow's hiking trails.

TOPICS

After discussion with my community partner, four subjects were chosen:

1. **Storm Disturbance.** After a devastating storm in 2017, many large trees at Great Hollow had fallen, were destroyed and remain there today. The sight of so many trees on the ground could be upsetting to visitors and also give the impression that the preserve cut the trees down, so a sign was created to educate visitors about the importance of storm disturbances to forest regeneration and health.
2. **Quaker Brook.** Due to its high water quality and cold temperatures, Quaker Brook is home to one of the most significant populations of wild brook trout in Connecticut. A sign was developed to educate visitors about the threats facing streams and sensitive fish like brook trout, and the importance of protecting stream health.
3. **American Beavers.** Beavers are important to many biologically diverse ecosystems because they build dams to hold water in place, creating ponds that are teeming with a wide variety of amphibians, fish, and other organisms. A sign was created to educate visitors about the role of beavers as "ecosystem engineers" and the benefits they provide to other wildlife.
4. **The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.** Hemlock trees in New England are rapidly declining due to an invasive insect, the hemlock woolly adelgid. A sign was created to educate visitors about the widespread decline of this tree, the threats posed by invasive pests, and how to recognize a tree infected with the adelgid.

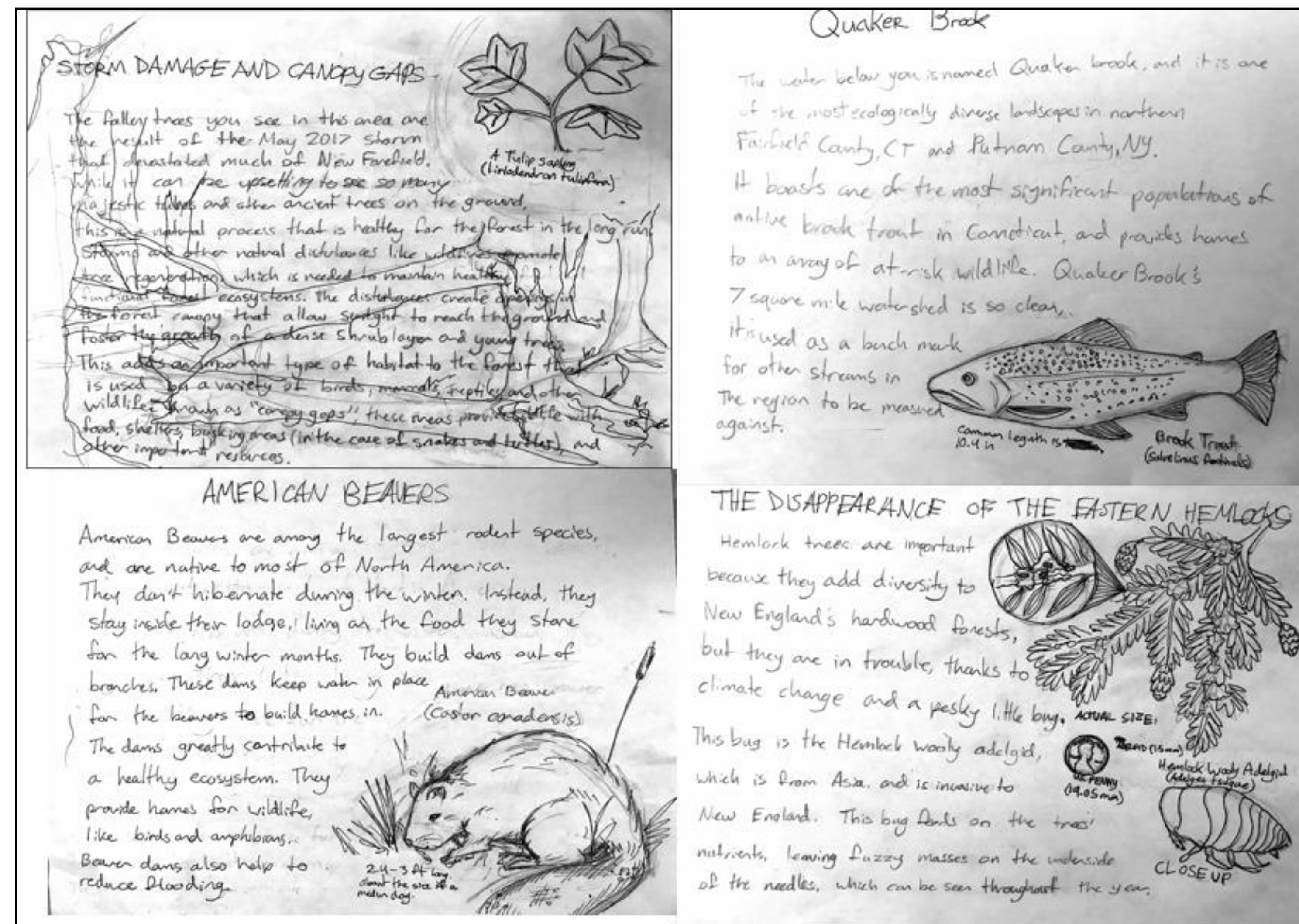


Figure 1. The original concept sketches for the project. Some changes and adjustments have been made to the artwork, for reasons that came up during the art process.

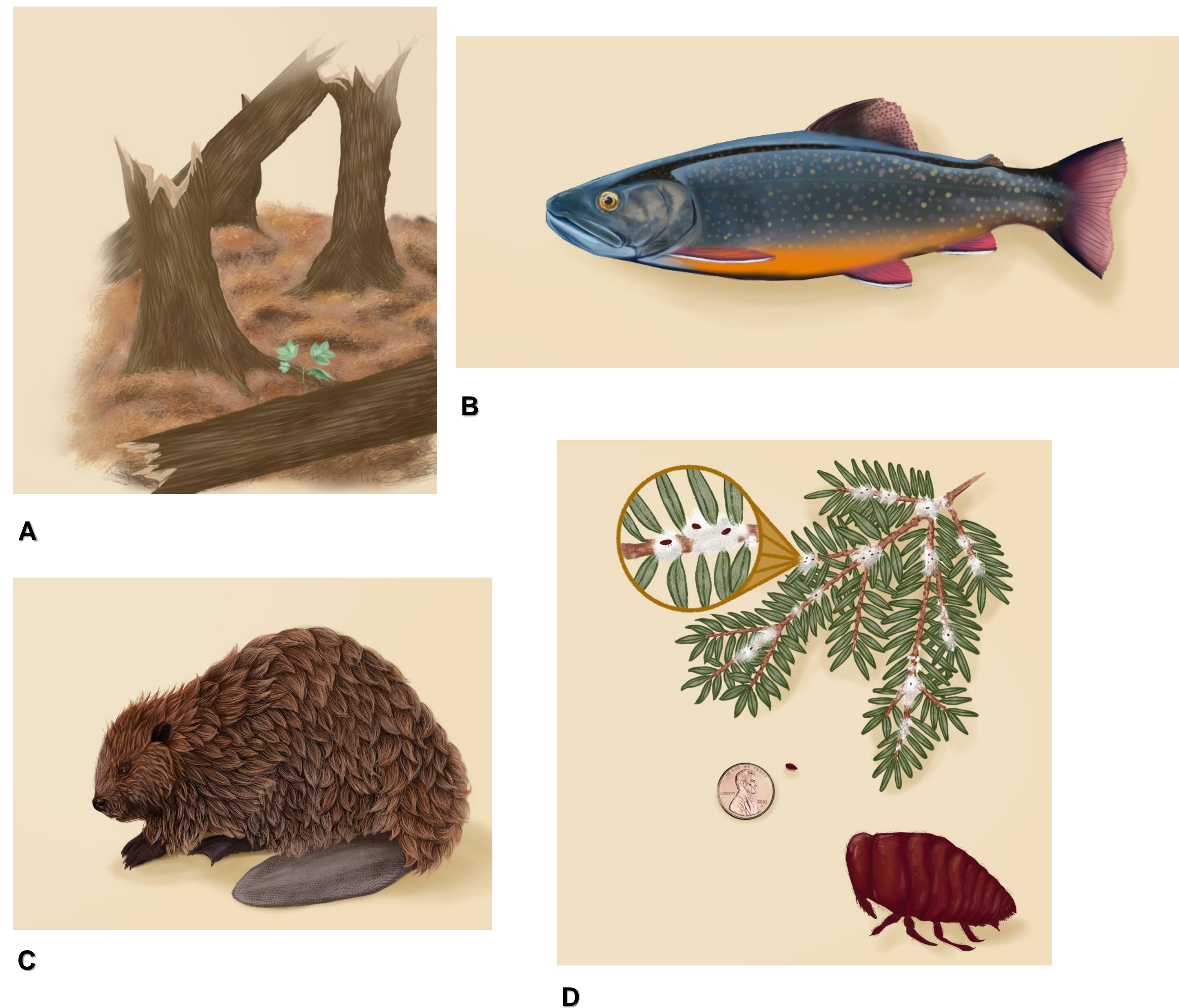
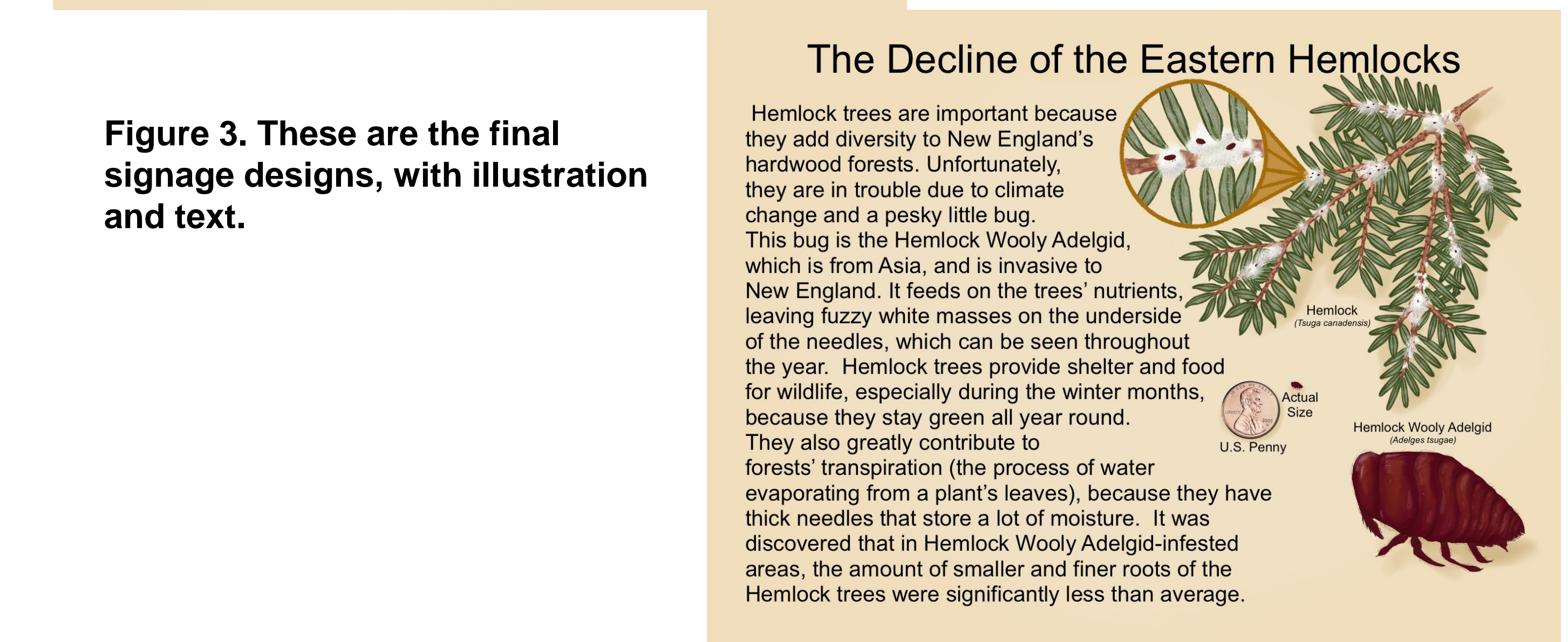
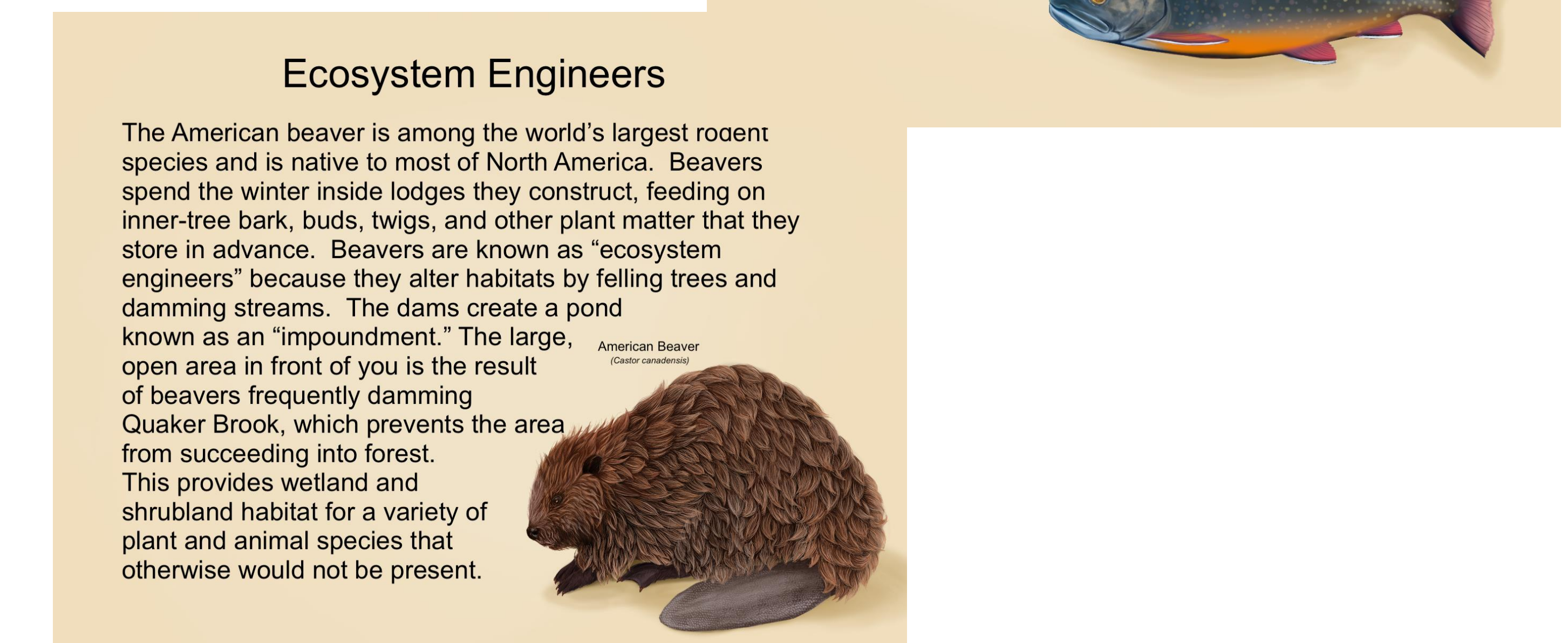
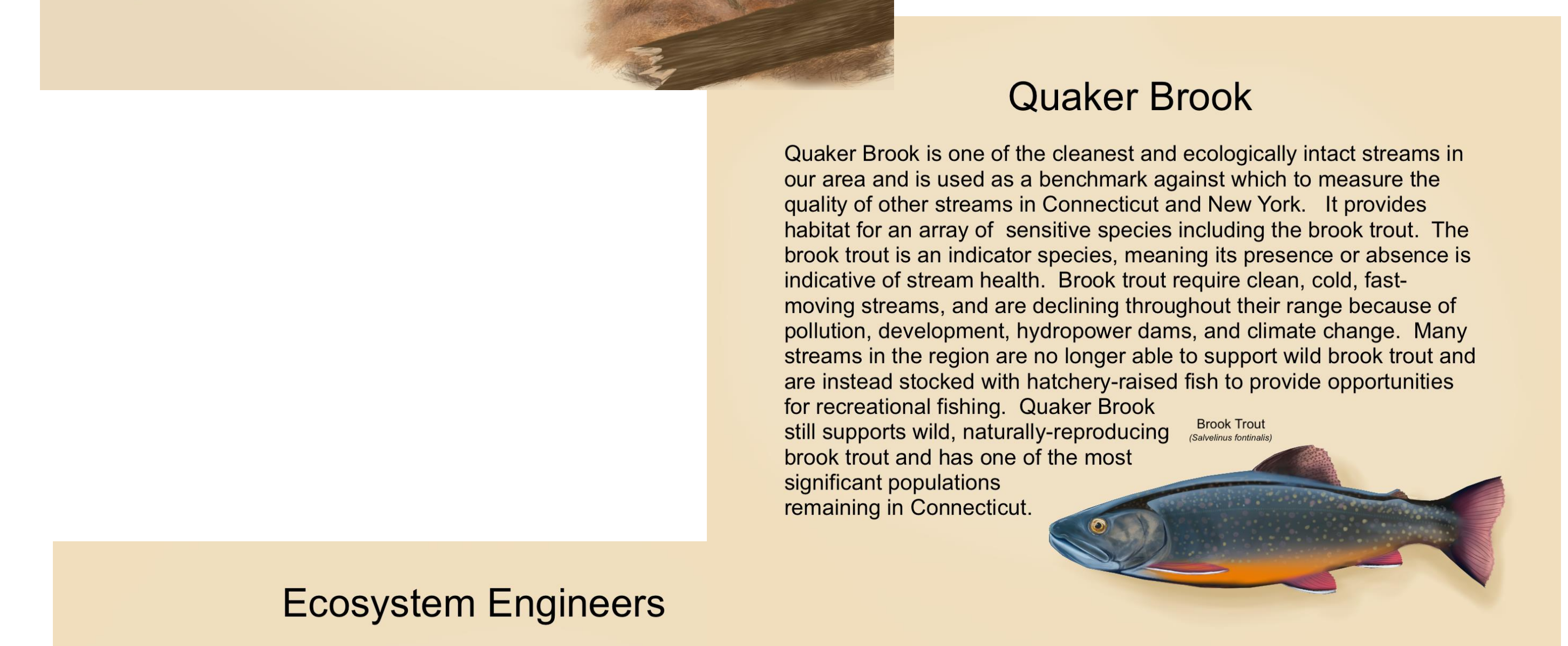
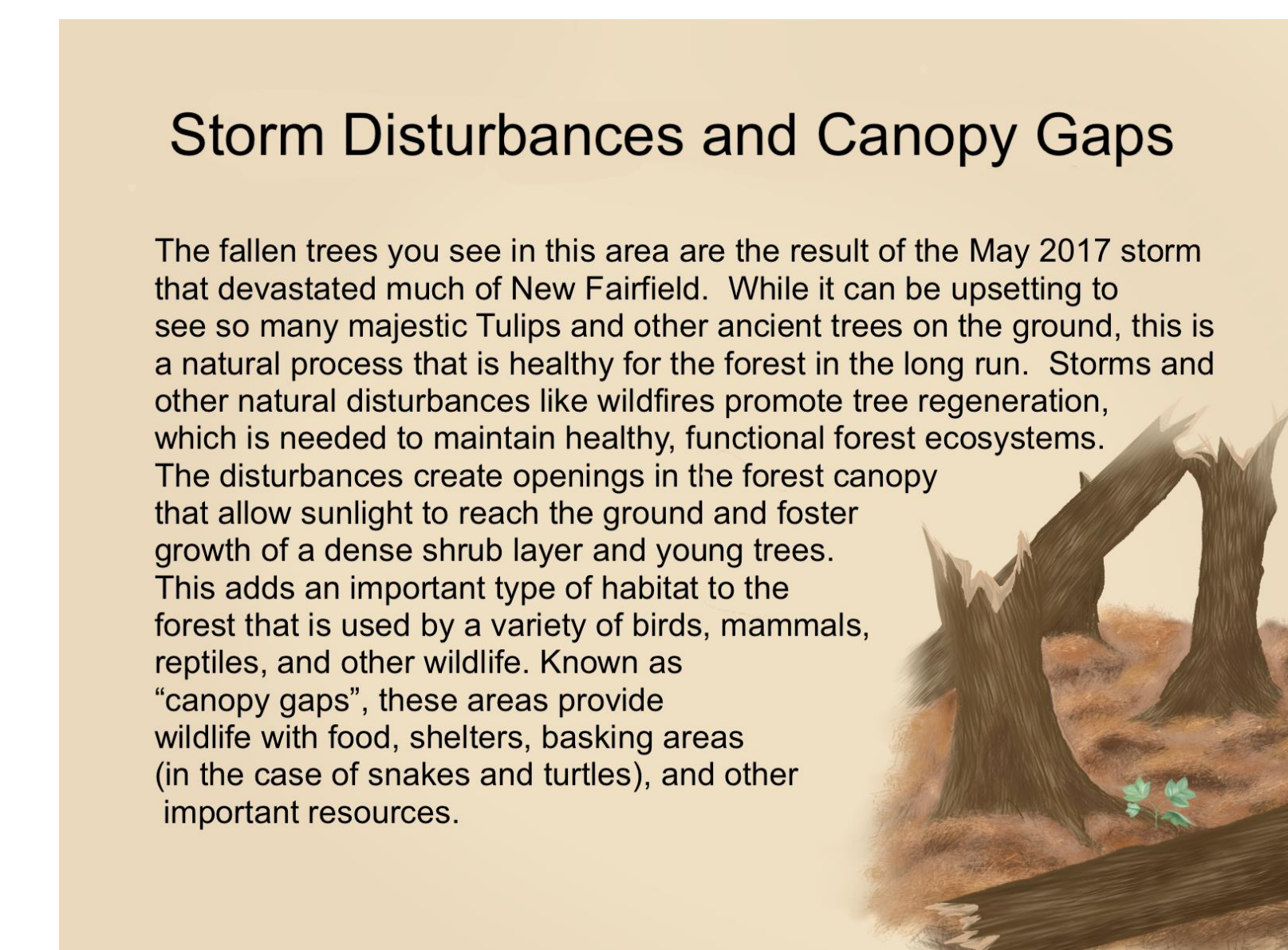


Figure 2. These are the finished illustrations that will go on the signage at Great Hollow Nature Preserve: A) Storm Damage; , B) Brook Trout C) American Beavers; Hemlock Woolly Adelgid



RESULTS

The artwork is completed and text has been added. The signs will be displayed at Great Hollow Nature Preserve to be read by visitors and provide answers to some questions they might have about local wildlife and ecosystems. The signs will be printed on a weather-durable surface and mounted in strategic places along Great Hollow hiking trails.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my community partner for working with me on this project. Dr. Chad Seewagen helped me brainstorm ideas and topics for the signs and edit draft text. This program has been a wonderful experience.