

July 6, 2006

TO: Region Managers
Programs and Services Managers
Park Managers
Visitor Protection and Law Enforcement Program Staff

FROM: Judy Johnson, Deputy Director

SUBJECT: **Geocaching, Letterboxing and Related Activities in State Park Areas**

DIRECTIVE 06-01

This directive provides guidelines and instructions for permitting the placement of geocaches, letterboxes, and related activities within state park areas. Geocaching, also known as GPS Stash Hunt or GeoStash, involves “hiding” items, usually containers holding various “treasures” and then providing specific Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) coordinates for each “cache” on a website. Visitors to these websites can choose which “cache” they would like to locate, and then visit a park and use their own personal GPS device to find the cache. Cache searchers typically bring along their own “treasure” and make an exchange once the cache has been located.

Virtual caching involves locating not a cache, but a specific landmark, feature, park sign, etc. These are encouraged at sensitive areas within state parks, such as natural areas, historical sites, museums, and interpretive centers in lieu of physical caches.

Letterboxing is the predecessor to geocaching, having been a recognized recreational activity for around 150 years since its inception in England. The person hiding the waterproof “letterbox” provides map coordinates and compass bearings, along with sometimes cryptic clues, to lead the hunter to the hidden container that includes a log book, a rubber stamp, and other items. The person finding the letterbox makes an entry into the log book and stamps their individual log book to record the find. With the advent and use of GPS technology, letterboxing is essentially the equivalent of geocaching.

Procedures concerning placement of geocaches or letterboxes within state park areas are as follows. For the purposes of this directive, both activities will be referred to as geocaching.

I. CACHE PLACEMENT GUIDELINES

In order to place a cache on State Parks' property, an individual or organization must obtain a Geocache Placement Permit from State Parks. Any cache located on State Parks' property that does not have a permit on file is subject to removal from its location, and after notification of the owner (if known), may be disposed of within 10 days.

- A. The person or organization applying for a Geocache Placement Permit must provide a valid address, telephone number, email address, and the website address on which the cache will be posted.
- B. The exact location of the cache must be pre-approved by the Park Manager or designee, and then forwarded to the Regional Programs and Services Manager who will coordinate a review of the location with the Regional Stewardship Manager. The primary considerations will be public safety and the prevention of undesirable impacts to natural, historical, and cultural resources. The location, including GPS coordinates and directions to the cache, must be provided to the Park Manager or designee and will become part of the Geocache Placement Permit.
- C. Permits will not be granted for areas that are not accessible to the general public. No geocache placement will be permitted during periods of extreme weather conditions, fire danger, or fire closure.
- D. All permits will be in effect for a period not to exceed 12 months. The exact starting and ending dates will be recorded on the Geocache Placement Permit. The permit may be extended for up to 12 months upon the request by the cache owner, subject to approval of the Park Manager or designee.

NOTE: If, during the effective period of a permit, a cache owner wants to change the location of the cache, a new Geocache Placement Permit must be issued and the previous permit will be cancelled.
- E. Upon expiration of a Geocache Placement Permit, the cache owner is responsible for removing the cache and for removing the cache location from all websites and any other information source.
- F. If the cache owner fails to remove the cache, it will be removed by park staff and held for ten days, after which staff will dispose of the cache. Confiscation and disposal by park staff will be recorded in an incident report.
- G. If it is determined that a cache is causing adverse impacts to the park environment, aesthetics, facilities or public use, the cache may be removed by the Park Manager or designee, and the Geocache Placement Permit cancelled. The cache owner will be notified, will be given ten days to reclaim the property from the park, and shall be responsible for any and all restoration costs.

II. CACHE CONTAINERS AND CONTENTS

- A. Cache containers must be non-breakable, have some form of latch or other closing mechanism to prohibit exposure of the contents to wildlife, and must be approved by the Park Manager or designee.
- B. Caches may not contain inappropriate or dangerous items. Such items include, but are not limited to, food items; illegal substances; medications; personal/hygiene products; pornographic materials; or weapons of any type. Log books are required for each cache and are to be provided by the owner of the cache.
- C. All caches are subject to initial inspection prior to placement and subsequent random inspections by State Parks' staff, who have the authority to immediately remove any item held in a cache deemed unacceptable or that is in violation of these guidelines.

III. CACHE LOCATIONS

- A. Physical caches are prohibited inside any State Parks' building, facility, or structure and are not allowed in designated natural areas, natural forest areas, natural area preserves, or heritage areas. Virtual caches are permitted in public areas of park buildings, facilities or structures, when such areas are open to the public, as long as use of the GPS unit does not disturb other park visitors or disrupt state park programs. Outdoor virtual caches are only permitted in natural areas, natural forest areas, natural area preserves or heritage areas to the extent that such areas are open to public access.
- B. The location of a cache must be pre-approved by the Park Manager or designee, the Regional Programs and Services Manager, and the Regional Stewardship Manager in accordance with the following conditions:
 - 1. Caches may not be placed in locations that may lead to the creation of spur/social trails.
 - 2. Caches may not be buried or attached to trees, nor may any structure, vegetation or stones be disturbed when placing a cache.
 - 3. Caches may not be placed in dangerous locations, biologically or culturally sensitive areas, inappropriate or protected areas and habitats, on cliffs, or underground or underwater.
 - 4. Caches may not unduly conflict with visitor uses or experiences in the park.
- C. Metal detectors may not be used in cache searches.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR GEOCACHE OWNERS

Once approved for placement, the geocache owner must meet the following requirements. Violation of any of these requirements will result in immediate removal of geocache by State Parks' personnel.

- A. The geocache must be checked by the geocache owner at least every 90 days. Proof of the check will be by e-mail, letter, or personal communication by the owner with the Park Manager or designee, and the owner's entry in the cache log book indicating the date of inspection.
- B. Notice on geocache web site must state the following information:
 1. The geocache may be placed on Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission managed property only by written permission from the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.
 2. The following items shall not be placed in the geocache: Food items; illegal substances; medications; personal hygiene products, pornographic materials; inappropriate, offensive, or hazardous materials or weapons of any type. **Log books are required for each cache and are to be provided by the owner of the cache.**
 3. It is the visitor's responsibility to orient themselves with policies and rules pertaining to State Parks areas.
 4. Report any incident, problem, or violation to State Parks staff.

V. COMPLIANCE

Failure to comply with these guidelines will result in the revocation of the Geocache Placement Permit. Continued failure to comply with these guidelines will prevent the issuance of any further geocaching permits to the non-compliant group or individual.

The Park Manager may close certain park areas or the entire park to geocaching activities if geocaching activities are found to have an adverse impact on park resources or the safety of park visitors.

VI. ATTACHMENT

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Geocache Placement Permit
(form #).

cc: Barbara Herman, Assistant Deputy Director
James Horan, Administrator, Business Development Service Center

**WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
GEOCACHE PLACEMENT PERMIT**

_____ **STATE PARK**

On this _____ day of _____, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, as represented by the Park Manager of _____ State Park, hereafter referred to as "State Parks", and _____, hereafter referred to as "Permittee" by their signatures below, do hereby agree as follows:

1. The Permittee, also known as geocache owner, has read and hereby agrees to comply with the requirements and instructions for geocache placement in _____ State Park.
2. The geocache has been viewed personally by the Park Manager or designee and is acceptable as to size, contents, and location.
3. Any rights granted or implied under this permit are non-exclusive and State Parks reserves the right to issue other permits simultaneously with this permit on any lands under control of State Parks. However, this permit may not be assigned by the Permittee to any other party.
4. The geocache owner hereby agrees to hold harmless, defend and indemnify the state of Washington, State Parks, its employees, agents and assigns, from and against all claims, suits or actions arising from the placement, movement or removal of the geocache, or resulting from the contents of the geocache, or the use or misuse of said contents.
5. This permit and all rights hereunder, shall expire on _____. Any equipment, and/or materials belonging to the geocache owner remaining on park premises 10 days subsequent to expiration, revocation and/or termination of this permit for any reason whatsoever shall then automatically become the property of State Parks at no cost to State Parks, and at State Parks' option.
6. The geocache authorized by this permit is located at _____ (GPS coordinates), within _____ State Park. Location approval is subject to additional approval as indicated below. Physical location/directions to this geocache are:

GEOCACHE LOCATION REVIEWED AND APPROVED:

By: _____
Regional Programs and Services Manager

Date: _____

Approval Conditions:

By: _____
Regional Stewardship Manager

Date: _____

Approval Conditions:

SIGNED AND MADE EFFECTIVE, SUBJECT TO ABOVE LOCATION APPROVAL AND CONDITIONS:

Geocache Owner

Park Manager

Website: _____

Park: _____

E-Mail: _____

E-Mail: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Phone: _____