

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

June 26, 2002

STAFF DIRECTIVE 02-02

TO: Park Superintendents
FROM: Philip K. McKnelly
SUBJECT: Geocaching Policy

This staff directive is to establish a policy to manage geocaching. Geocaching (GPS Stash, GeoStash) involves the placement of a container with various items within it in a specific location and then posting the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) coordinates to a website. Visitors to the website then attempt to locate this container using the GPS. This activity started soon after the U.S. Department of Defense turned off the selective availability of the GPS signals in May 2000. This improved the accuracy of most recreational GPS units to 10 - 20 meters. Contents of the container can be anything and typically involves the exchange of items. Another aspect of this activity is virtual caching. This does not involve the actual placement of a cache; rather, coordinates are provided for a specific location where there is a unique natural feature, park sign, etc.

Geocaches have been placed in our state parks without the approval of park staff. These placements have resulted in the following concerns:

- Caches have been placed in sensitive natural or cultural areas.
- Caches may contain inappropriate or dangerous items. (One park cache contained prescription drugs.)
- Caches have lead to the creation of spur trails resulting in resource damage and the possibility of visitors leaving established trails and becoming lost.
- Caches may be placed in dangerous or inappropriate areas such as on a cliff or underwater.
- The location of a cache may invite the public into an area we do not inspect for hazards.

In consideration of the above concerns it has been decided to manage geocaching through the use of the special activity permit procedure on a trial basis. If this activity is found to have a negative impact on the park resources or presents public safety issues the park superintendent may ban geocaching from specific park areas or the entire park. The following conditions are to be addressed when issuing a geocaching special activity permit:

- Virtual caches should be encouraged in lieu of physical caches.
- The \$25 permit fee is to be waived for virtual caches.
- The person applying for the permit shall provide a valid address and telephone number.
- The cache placement location, including GPS coordinates, must be stated on the permit and approved by the park superintendent to minimize undesirable impacts to cultural and natural resources as well as minimize hazards to the public.
- A specific time period when a cache may be left in place shall be designated to minimize the creation of spur trails. At the end of the designated time period the cache is to be removed and the web site posting retired by the permit holder. The actual time period the cache is permitted to be in place will be determined by the park superintendent, not to exceed three months.
- Caches may not be buried, nor may vegetation or stones be disturbed when selecting cache locations.
- Cache containers are to be transparent and have some form of latch or other closure to deter wildlife.
- Contents of the cache are subject to inspection by park staff at any time; park staff will have the authority to remove any items deemed unacceptable. Examples include food, medications of any type, pornography, weapons of any type, etc. A log book is encouraged in lieu of exchange items.
- All cache website postings must request the cache searchers to leave a note on their vehicle dashboard identifying the operator as being a geocachers. Orienteering groups in parks currently do this for safety reasons.

Geocaches and any contents that are removed by park staff are to be documented in a case incident report. Park staff should periodically review the geocaching websites to monitor caches placed within the park.

This staff directive is effective immediately.

LRL/tlj

cc: Superintendent of State Parks
District Superintendents
Parks Chief Ranger