Guidelines for Geocaching/Letterboxing on
Virginia State Parks Property

Introduction

This document provides guidance for state park personnel and other individuals or groups interested in creating new opportunities for geocaching or letterboxing activities on lands managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of State Parks.

Geocaching is a recreational activity that uses hand-held GPS (global positioning system) units to locate hidden containers or caches. The simplest and most common form of geocaching involves an individual or group placing a cache in the field and sharing the location and coordinates on the Internet (usually on www.geocaching.com). Participants then use the coordinates and clues to locate the cache. Most caches contain log books for finders to sign and also have on-line log books. Many caches contain items for a finder to take. If a finder removes something from the cache, they are asked to leave something for future cachers to find.

Types of Caches

Traditional Caches are small containers such as metal ammunition cases or sealed plastic containers. Most caches contain a log book.

Micro Caches are smaller than the traditional cache, usually the size of a 35mm film canister. These caches may or may not contain a log book.

Nano Caches are smaller even than micro caches. Nanos are about the size of a lip balm can or about 1" in diameter. Most of these do not contain a log.

Multi or Cluster Caches are groups of caches in one area. Usually the posted coordinates will lead to a traditional cache that contains clues or coordinates for other micro or nano-caches located nearby.

Virtual Caching is similar to geocaching but does not use a physical cache. Coordinates and clues posted on-line lead participants to a scenic overlook or other point of interest. Like geocaches, virtual caches have an on-line log where finders can post comments and photos. As

of 1/15/08 two parks have virtual caches, York River and Natural Tunnel. A more defined type of virtual cache dealing with geology is known as earth caching. For more information on virtual caches look at www.waymarking.com/ and for earth caches go to http://www.earthcache.com/ .

Letterboxing is similar to geocaching but does not use GPS units. Participants follow clues and compass headings to find caches in the field. These caches are similar to traditional caches and usually contain a log book and stamp. More information on letterboxing can be found at www.letterboxing.org/ .

Travel Bugs and Geo Coins are items that have a unique serial number that can be used to track their movement from cache to cache. A participant will remove a bug or coin from a cache and place it in a new cache at a different location. The participant will go to www.geocaching.com and use the serial number to log the change in location.

Approval

A cache may not be placed on Virginia State Park's property without written consent of the park manager or designee using a Geocache Placement Application. All caches placed in a state park by the public and caches placed by park staff that will remain more than one week must be placed at the site approved by the application form and must follow "Guidelines for Geocaching / Letterboxing on Virginia State Park Property."

Each cache requires its own approved Geocache Placement Application form that is good for three years from the date of issue. Groups who want to conduct a sponsored event are required to complete a Virginia State Parks Special Use Permit and pay any required fee.

Cache Placement & Information

- Park managers will encourage placement applicants to develop caches that enhance visitor experience by highlighting particular park resources or destinations.

- Caches will be placed at locations where they do not negatively impact educational programming, natural/cultural resources, visitor safety, or other users.

- Caches may not be buried and the surrounding environment will not be altered to conceal the cache.

- Most caches will be placed near existing trails and only the existing trails will be used for travel to the site; a few caches may be placed in more remote locations to challenge experienced cachers.

- The cache container must be marked with an official Virginia State Parks Geocache Sticker containing the name of the cache as it appears on the Geocache Placement Application and website. Geocache Stickers are available at the park office.

- The cache container must be approved by the park manager or designee. Military hardware may be inappropriate for some locations. Unacceptable containers include pipe or anything resembling an explosive device, rust prone material, glass or brightly colored objects. Park staff may require the use of Micro or Nano Caches in areas where a traditional cache would be inappropriate. In all cases the cache container will be waterproof.

- Caches may only contain a logbook in which to record visits, a description of geocaching and non-perishable, family friendly items. Unacceptable items include food of any kind, pocket knives or weapons of any kind, illegal items such as drugs and material restricted from minors such as tobacco and alcohol.

- The description for all approved caches should include coordinates for the nearest parking lot and should designate that area for parking to access the caches. Listings will also include: park operating hours, parking fees and any other park regulations required by the site manager.

- All geocaches placed in the park, must be searchable by everyone on geocaching.com and not only those with premium memberships.

Monitoring the Cache

- The individual or group approved to place the cache is responsible for the maintenance of the cache. Monitoring of the cache is required four times per year. Approved applicants may be enrolled as a volunteer; dates and amount of time spent monitoring the cache should be emailed to the park volunteer coordinator. If there is no report to the park that the cache is being monitored as required, the cache will be removed. Vandalism, deterioration of the site, illegal or hazardous substances will be reported to the responsible park staff immediately.

- State park personnel will visit each cache at least once a year to assure compliance with approved guidelines.

Removal of a Cache

- Virginia State Parks retains the right to remove, or have removed, a cache that is in an inappropriate location, not maintaining family friendly items, causing undue impact on resources, or for other reasons deemed inconsistent with the mission of the Virginia State Parks System.

- Unapproved caches will be removed or a Geocache Placement Application issued if deemed appropriate by the park manager.

- In the event of removal by park staff, a cache and contents shall be disposed of in accordance with DCR Conservation Officer Law Enforcement Manual, Chapter 26, LOST AND FOUND, ABANDONED PROPERTY. Removed items of apparent value shall be maintained for return to owner or sale as unclaimed found property; park officers can immediately dispose "of items which any reasonable person would consider to be trash and of no obvious value."

- A Geocache Placement Application is good for three years from the date of issue. A new three-year application for the same cache site MAY be issued if the park manager observes no noticeable damage currently at or leading to the site and assesses that no unacceptable impact is likely to occur with another three years of use. Also, the placement application may not be renewed in cases where the park, or the area where the park is located, has become "cache saturated" in order to allow for the placement of new caches.

- The site of a removed cache must be restored to its original condition to the satisfaction of the park staff.

- An approved applicant who wishes to relocate or remove a cache must complete a new Geocache Placement Application prior to making any changes.

- If there is a change in the person responsible for maintaining the cache it is the responsibility of the new person or group to make new application with the park office.

- The responsible party will delete or close site locations from all publications and websites within seven days of the cache's removal.

Conclusion

Properly managed geocaching / letterboxing activities in Virginia State Parks offer significant recreational and educational value to visitors, including opportunities for a growing number of families to experience appropriate GPS outdoor adventures in parks.

VIRGINIA STATE PARKS
Geocache Placement Application
All caches must be listed on geocaching.com and made available to all members.

1. Park _____

2. Name _____

3. Address _____
   . _____

4. Phone # _____   Fax# _____

5. Email Address _____

6. Cache Name _____

7. Type of Cache _____

8. Location Coordinates_____

9. Physical Description of Area _____

   . _____

10. Physical Description of Container and Original Contents _____
    . _____

11. Coordinates of Nearest Parking Area _____

12. Websites Cache Will Be Listed On_____
   _____

Date Placed_____   Date Removed_____

_____   _____   ☐   ☐
Signature of Park Manager   Date   Approved   Not Approved

Comments: