



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION**

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**Division of State Parks**

**Memorandum**

TO: Virginia State Parks Staff  
FROM: Joseph Elton, Director, Virginia State Parks  
DATE: June 9, 2008  
RE: Guidelines for Geocaching / Letterboxing

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Geocaching is an increasingly popular recreational activity that has placed dozens of caches in state parks, some with and many without our knowledge. Some parks have established their own caches to enhance visitor experience and to improve interpretation of park resources. With all this activity on state park properties, a suggestion was made that guidelines are needed to keep all park and public caches on state parks operating with consistency to effectively provide visitor enjoyment and resource protection.

Sammy Zambon at Caledon was tasked to prepare a first draft guideline. His work, edited by Keith Morgan and Chuck Wyatt, was reviewed by Forrest Gladden, Fred Hazelwood, John Heerwald, Brian Heft, Theresa Layman, Mark Schupp, Warren Wahl and Holly Walker. The members of this group are to be commended for their contributions.

The revised, approved guideline is attached for immediate implementation at all state park properties.

Joseph Elton



# Guidelines for Geocaching/Letterboxing on Virginia State Parks Property

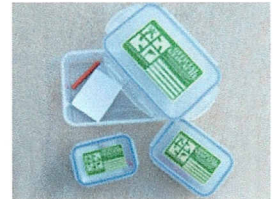
## Introduction

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](http://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/](http://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/](http://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. 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](http://www.geocaching.com) and use the serial number to log the change in location.



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## **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.

### **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 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 cache may remain at the permitted site for no more than three years. At that time the cache must be moved to a new location or removed. The site must be restored to its original condition to the satisfaction of the park staff. This will help control cache abandonment and the formation of “volunteer” trails.
- 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**

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: