



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
441 G STREET NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20314-1000

CECW-CO

JUN 10 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, MAJOR SUBORDINATE COMMANDS AND DISTRICT COMMANDS, ATTN: CHIEFS, CONSTRUCTION- OPERATIONS DIVISIONS

SUBJECT: Geocaching at Civil Works Projects

1. **Purpose.** Geocaching may be allowed on public lands managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations Title 36 (CFR 36) and any applicable State or local rules and regulations, provided the activity is conducted in a non-obtrusive manner. Geocaching can be an appropriate and compatible recreational activity on public land and water, as long as common sense guidelines are followed. Some Corps projects have used the popularity of the sport as an innovative tool to distribute information, such as water safety, in geocaches on Corps-managed lands.

2. **What is Geocaching.** Geocaching is an outdoor adventure activity for users of global positioning systems (GPS). Individuals and organizations set up geocaches (caches) all over the world and share their locations, often through the Internet. Numerous websites are available, with one of the most popular being <http://www.geocaching.com/>. GPS users can then find the caches through published coordinates and site descriptions. Most commonly, a geocache is an object or container holding small objects for exchange. The finder may remove the enclosed "prize" and leave another, sign a logbook, or utilize a number of variations. Some "caches" are simply locations with unusual vegetation or unique land features the cache owner wants the cache hunter to experience (virtual caches). There is also a derivative form of the sport that searches for published coordinates of an existing historical monument, plaque, or benchmark. While geocaching has become the standard name for the sport, other terms include Navicaching, GPS Orienteering, GPS Stash Hunt, and Benchmarking.

3. **Policy.** In accordance with 36 CFR 327.19 or 327.21, District Engineers, or their designees, may develop permit systems or policies to track and/or control placement of geocaches on project lands, provided this use does not conflict with project missions or security. Simplicity and ease of compliance should be emphasized. Information needed from the proposed geocache owner will include the cache coordinates (location), his/her name, and his/her address and phone number. The intent of collecting this information is to keep track of the location and number of caches on the project and to contact the owner if the cache needs to be removed. During application, the project should ask the proposed cache owner to provide a current picture form of identification with an address to confirm the applicant's identity. This information is voluntary, however the applicants request can be denied for failure to comply with the information request. The project is required to store this information in a secure manner.

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Geocache objects or containers should be clearly identified as such when placed on public lands. Transparent containers are required, due to homeland security issues. Caches should not contain alcohol, illicit, or other inappropriate materials. It is the due diligence responsibility of the Project Operations Manager to work with the cache owners and jointly conduct periodically cache inspections to insure they are not being used for illicit and/or inappropriate materials.

a. Individuals or groups that participate in geocaching activities on Corps projects must assume responsibility for coordinating these activities with the appropriate Corps project. This will help prevent potential conflicts with management activities, such as controlled burns, timber sales, wildlife planting activities, etc.

4. **Restrictions**. It is the due diligence responsibility of the Project Operations Manager to establish designated areas where geocaching will be allowed and other areas where it will be restricted. Geocaching activities will not be allowed to occur in restricted areas where there could be conflicts with project missions, project security, or the safety of the general public. Examples where geocaching would not be allowed include but are not limited to:

- a. In designated restricted areas.
- b. If the cache, directly or indirectly, would negatively affect ecologically, environmentally, or socially sensitive areas (threatened or endangered species, critical habitats, cultural resources, tribal lands without consent, etc.).
- c. In areas that may pose safety risks, such as unstable banks, cliffs, or other potential hazards.
- d. Where geocaching activities may interfere with established public uses, such as launching, picnicking, swimming, etc.
- e. Below normal operating pool levels.
- f. Where geocaching activities may interfere with the operation of the project.
- g. In areas where the security of the project and/or public safety would be at risk.

5. **Management Considerations**. Management considerations at individual projects may require other permanent or temporary measures to ensure that geocaching activities are compatible with other project uses. For example, a project may need to prohibit geocaching during active management in an area for timber harvest, prescribed burning, hunting, or other wildlife management activities. Some projects may want to encourage and actively participate in geocaching activities to promote the Corps message in a positive way.

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a. In certain instances, it may be necessary to issue a Special Event Permit in compliance with Title 36, 327.21. Conditions that may warrant the need for a Special Event Permit may include one-time activities that are publicly advertised, commercial in nature, involve large numbers of participants, provide cash prizes or other significant awards, have the potential to conflict with other uses of an area, etc.

b. If a cache must be removed from public lands for operational, safety, environmental, cultural, or other reason, a reasonable effort should be made to contact the cache owner and request removal. If the owner cannot be found, or the cache is not removed within a reasonable time, the cache may be removed and impounded as abandoned property, under 36 CFR 327.15.

6. **Summary.** In general, geocaching can be a fun and appropriate recreational activity at Corps projects, provided the security or missions of the project are not compromised. It provides an opportunity for positive interactions and partnerships with local groups involved in this activity. Monitoring of web sites and communication and participation with these groups can form healthy relationships with benefits to all involved. Working with these groups can prevent undesired behavior and promote the Corps as a willing partner. Regulation should be based on common sense needs of specific projects or regions, with minimum permitting burden on the recreating public.

7. **Point of Contact.** The point of contact is Mr. Tim Toplisek, CECW-SAD, (202) 761-4259.

FOR THE COMMANDER



MICHAEL B. WHITE
Chief, Operations
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