

Operational Policy

Visitor Management

Geocaching on QPWS managed areas

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) of the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (DNPRSR). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly to all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Purpose

To provide advice and clarify how geocaching and other similar Global Positioning System (GPS) related recreational activities will be managed on QPWS managed areas.

Definitions

'Geocaching'

Geocaching is an outdoor treasure hunting activity using Global Positioning System (GPS) enabled devices. In the case of traditional geocaching, participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the "geocache" or "cache" hidden at that location. There are many other variations including EarthCaching, virtual caching etc (refer Appendix 1)

'Geocache' or 'Cache'

A typical traditional cache is a waterproof container containing a logbook/sheet and a pencil.

'Geocoin'

A minted coin created by geocachers as a kind of signature item or calling card, the progress of which can be tracked online via a unique tracking number. A geocoin is typically 38mm to 50mm in diameter with a thickness of 2.5mm to 4mm.

'QR code'

Abbreviated from Quick Response Code. The trademark for a type of matrix barcode that can be read by devices including Smartphones.

'Suitable receptacle'

A receptacle which is watertight, is made of material that will withstand natural elements, is neutral-coloured, has never been used to store food and is a maximum of 2L. The receptacle must have an external label identifying it as a geocache (microcaches excepted).

Refer Geocaching Activity Guidelines for further information.

'Travel bug'

Trackable tag that is attached to a trade item.

'QPWS managed areas'

Includes all protected areas, state forests, forests reserves, and recreation areas managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, the *Forestry Act 1959*, the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*, and *Brisbane Forest Park Act 1977*. Marine parks managed under the *Marine Parks Act 2004* are not covered by this policy.

'Watercourse'

Watercourse includes a river, creek or stream in which water flows permanently or intermittently.

Background

Since the placement of the first geocache in the United States in 2000, geocaching has become a very popular outdoor recreation activity, with approximately 40, 000 geocache locations throughout Australia. QPWS manages a large number of areas which are very desirable for geocaching activities, and an increasing number of caches have been found on QPWS managed areas. Approval for most of these caches has not been granted by QPWS to date.

Technically, a geocache could be considered litter under relevant legislation and in the absence of a policy position, local decisions have been made whether to sanction geocaching on a particular park. This has led to a situation where staff have at times removed unauthorised caches without notifying the cache owner, potentially resulting in further environmental disturbance through people trying to locate the cache, or through replacement of the cache by the cache owner. The removal of these caches has generated negative feedback on geocaching websites.

Traditional geocaching and certain variants of the activity can be legitimately carried out on many QPWS managed areas providing a suitable receptacle is used and other codes of practice and activity guidelines are adhered to. However, the placement of unauthorised caches and other inappropriate caching practices can cause damage to natural and cultural values.

Some variations of geocaching, such as EarthCaching or virtual caching, do not involve the placement of a cache. Instead, the coordinates of a unique feature or aspect of the earth are listed on a geocaching website. A small number of EarthCaches have been listed in Queensland, some of which are within QPWS managed areas. Although not required, some of these listings have been endorsed/"approved" by local QPWS staff.

Policy statements

Geocaching opportunities

- Traditional geocaching is an acceptable practice on QPWS managed areas, providing:
 - prior approval is sought from/notification is provided to local QPWS staff (refer Geocaching Activity Guidelines);
 - a suitable receptacle containing only a logbook/sheet, cache information sheet, pencil, QR code and Geocoin/s is used and no other trophy or trade items (including Travel Bugs) are left in the cache;
 - no food items are left in the cache;
 - caches are not buried;
 - no flora or fauna is disturbed;
 - where there is a constructed walking track the cache is accessible from the track;
 - caches are available from trails (where they exist) or other publically accessible areas; and
 - the creation of new tracks and trails to access the cache is avoided.

* For further details refer to QPWS Geocaching Activity Guidelines.

- Traditional geocaching is not appropriate:
 - in areas which are not open to public access such as Restricted Access Areas, Seasonal Closure Areas and National Park (Scientific); and
 - where the caching activity is likely to cause adverse impacts, for example:
 - in close proximity to culturally sensitive places; and
 - near areas known to contain endangered ecological communities, threatened species, populations, or their habitats that are likely to be sensitive to disturbance.

- Traditional geocaching may not be appropriate:
 - in wetland areas;
 - in dams, lakes or watercourses;
 - in vegetated fore dunes;
 - in caves;
 - near wildlife breeding colonies; and
 - in some National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) areas.
- Geocaching activities that do not involve placement of a physical cache ie Earth and Virtual caching can be undertaken in publically accessible areas without the need for approval or notification.
- The maximum term of approval for a cache to be placed in a QPWS managed area is 5 years. Caches must be removed after this time, unless otherwise approved. Any such approvals will be subject to documented evidence of cache sustainability (refer Geocaching Activity Guidelines).
- Webcam caches will not be allowed.
- Organised group caching events, such as Mega Events and Cache-In Trash-Out Events, are not covered by this policy and will be considered on a case by case basis through the Group Activity Permit assessment process.
- QPWS will collaborate with other land management agencies to establish consistent policies wherever practicable.

Approval for/notification of cache placement

- Prior to placing a cache in a QPWS managed area, geocachers must contact local QPWS staff to obtain advice on whether:
 - a Geocaching Application Form must be submitted in order to obtain formal written approval prior to cache placement, or;
 - notification of cache placement only is required (submission of Geocaching Application Form not required).
- In areas where submission of a Geocaching Application Form is not required, all other rules in the geocaching policy and guidelines apply. Local QPWS must be notified via email of cache details once it has been placed (refer Geocaching Activity Guidelines).

Unauthorised caches

- Where unauthorised caches are located by QPWS staff:
 - in an inappropriate area, QPWS will remove the cache, and notify the owner it will be available for collection from the local QPWS office for 30 calendar days.
 - in an appropriate area, the owner of the cache will be contacted and notified they have 30 calendar days to register the cache with the local QPWS office. After 30 days, if the cache has not been registered or removed, QPWS will remove the cache.
- Where unauthorised caches do not contain contact details of the cache owner, QPWS staff will contact the Tourism and Visitor Management Unit who will advise the cache listing website of the management actions taken by QPWS staff.
- QPWS will work with the geocaching community to provide tenure information to allow geocachers to more readily identify QPWS managed areas.
- Refer to the Geocaching Activity Guidelines for further details on managing unauthorised caches.

Activity guidelines

- Geocaching Activity Guidelines will be developed and reviewed over time in conjunction with the geocaching community and the activity will be conducted in accordance with these Guidelines. The Guidelines will cover:
 - Authorised cache contents and cache sizes.
 - Cache placement approval/notification process and issues for consideration.
 - Local registers of authorised caches.
 - Unauthorised caches.
 - Monitoring of cache locations.

User Conflict

Geocaching will be excluded from locations where the activity is in conflict with other users, or poses a safety issue.

Reference material

QPWS Geocaching Activity Guidelines

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care, it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Resource Management should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

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Signature

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Date

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