

QPWS Geocaching Activity Guidelines

**For geocaching and other similar GPS
related recreational activities conducted on
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
(QPWS) managed areas**

July 2012

Related documents: QPWS Operational Policy 'Geocaching on QPWS-managed areas'

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1. Approval for/notification of cache placement

Prior to placing a geocache 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 (refer to section 1.1 – 1.2), or
- Notification of cache placement only is required (refer to section 1.3)

Refer to geocache placement procedure flowchart (Attachment 1).

If necessary, QPWS Park Enquiries can provide contact details for local offices.

1.1 Geocaching Application Form

Send completed Geocaching Application Forms to the local QPWS office (email preferred).

The form will be available from QPWS Park Enquiries. Rangers can access the form and other relevant information regarding geocaching from Ranger Base (QPWS intranet site).

1.2 Processing of applications

When Geocaching Applications Forms are received by QPWS staff, they will determine the appropriateness of the site for geocaching activities, giving consideration to how many caches a park or particular site can sustain. This should include assessing the location and number of existing caches, any access constraints, the potential impacts of any expected increase in visitation, and whether clustering or dispersing caches would reduce potential impacts. QPWS staff will also determine the appropriate size of the cache container relevant to the location in consultation with the geocacher (refer section 2.1).

Following assessment of the application (which may take up to 40 business days), QPWS staff will notify the geocacher of the outcome (approved/rejected).

If an application is rejected, QPWS staff are encouraged to contact the geocacher and determine whether a more suitable cache location or type etc can be negotiated.

If the cache has been approved, geocachers should retain a copy of the approval notification for their records.

Approval to place a cache does not guarantee the location will remain open to the public, as parks or parts of parks may be closed either temporarily or permanently for park management reasons. QPWS will not be responsible for advising geocachers of any park closures.

1.3 Notification of cache placement (areas where submission of Geocaching Application Form not required).

Where geocaching activities are considered unlikely to cause unacceptable impacts on natural and cultural values, QPWS staff can allow the activity without the need for submission of a Geocaching Application Form.

In lieu of this QPWS will provide email advice approving the placement of a cache. Provision of this advice to geocachers when they make initial contact with QPWS regarding proposed caches will constitute written approval for geocache listing websites.

In these situations, once a cache has been placed geocachers will notify local QPWS staff via email and provide the following details:

- Contact details of cache owner
- Cache name and listing website
- Cache coordinates
- Cache contents.

QPWS staff may request further details.

All other rules in QPWS geocaching policy and activity guidelines still apply.

1.4 Maximum cache placement periods

The maximum term of approval for a traditional cache to be placed in a QPWS managed area is 5 years. Where there are concerns over cumulative impacts on the site, the approval period may be for shorter time periods.

Caches must be removed or relocated (with approval) once the initial approval period has expired, unless written consent to extend the placement period is sought. Photographs of the cache site and surrounding area must be provided with the new consent form to confirm the cache has not created adverse impacts on the areas (refer to section 9.2).

In areas where notification of cache placement only is required, caches can remain in place for 5 years, unless local QPWS staff advise the cache owner it must be removed or relocated within this time.

1.5 Conditions

When cache placements are approved by local QPWS staff, the approval will include standard terms and conditions. QPWS staff have the option to include other conditions including the requirement for geocachers to provide photographs of cache sites at pre-determined intervals, i.e. 6 months, for the monitoring purposes in sensitive areas.

1.6 Fees

No fee will be charged by QPWS to place a cache (unless part of a group caching event). Geocachers must pay all other applicable fees (ie camping, vehicle access permits, etc).

1.7 Non-physical caches

Written consent for or notification of non-physical cache listings including Earth and Virtual caches is not required. However, if non-physical caches are listed in unsuitable areas they can impact on park values and visitor safety, so geocachers are encouraged to liaise with local QPWS staff to assess the suitability of the proposed location and seek guidance on the information to be provided in the cache listing.

2. Geocache specifications

2.1 Size

Approval can be granted for cache containers ranging in size from micro up to 2 litre capacity (for example recycled ammunitions container). Appropriate size and type of caches will generally be dependant on the physical nature of the site, level of visitation, etc. For example, in some areas, larger caches may be preferable as less searching may be required to locate them, whereas smaller caches may be suitable in areas that are less sensitive and can handle increased searching activities or where accidental discovery by non-geocaching visitors is more likely.

For example, in a rocky location a larger cache may be easily hidden, whereas in a day-use area or campground, a smaller cache may be more appropriate as there would be less chance accidental discovery, and these areas can generally handle increased searching activities*.

In rainforest environments, larger caches may be more appropriate as these areas are sensitive to increased searching activities. Caches may be more easily located in open woodland and these areas can generally handle higher searching activity, so smaller caches may be more appropriate*.

*Note: intended as a guide only, will not apply in all situations

2.2 Receptacle type

Geocache receptacles must be:

- watertight;
- made of material that will withstand natural elements and cannot be chewed through by wildlife;
- neutral-coloured so that they do not stand out in the natural environment; and
- must never have been used to store food as odours could attract wildlife.

Recycled ammunitions containers are very popular and satisfy the above criteria.

2.3 Label

The receptacle must have an external label identifying it as a geocache (microcaches excepted).

2.4 Contents

Caches can contain:

- logbook/sheet;
- cache information sheet;
- QR code;
- pencil; and
- Geocoin/s.

Apart from Geocoins, no other trade or trophy items (including Travel Bugs) can be placed in the cache due to the potential for geocachers to inadvertently leave inappropriate items such as seeds, soap, scented items, etc.

Food items must not be left in the cache, as the odours are likely to attract wildlife.

3. Cache internet listings

3.1 Information for inclusion in cache listings

The online information for a cache must:

- Identify the location as a national park / protected area and must specify that all standard rules and regulations must be complied with.
- Include an educational message about the natural or cultural values of the cache location.
- Include a link to QPWS Park Alerts
http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/park_alerts/index.php

The cache owner must assume all responsibility for the accuracy of the online content of their cache listing(s).

4. Hiding and seeking caches

4.1 Pre-placement responsibilities of geocachers

Prior to placing a geocache in a QPWS managed area, geocachers must contact local QPWS staff who will advise whether formal approval must be sought prior to cache placement or if notification only is required (refer section 1).

Geocachers must check QPWS Park Alerts prior to placing caches.

4.2 Sustainable caching practices

When placing or seeking a cache, geocachers must travel on marked and maintained trails or in publicly accessible areas (e.g. picnic areas). All caches must normally be accessible from the trail or the public area, unless marked and maintained trails do not exist.

Caches must not be buried and geocachers must not dig holes, construct stone cairns, or damage or disturb vegetation to hide or discover caches.

5. Adoption or maintenance of cache for another cache owner

Do not abandon caches. If you stop maintaining a cache, remove the container, archive its listing and explain the disposition of the cache in your archive note, or put it up for adoption or rescue. If you de-list a cache on one host, but keep it on another, make sure you mention this in the archive note to prevent rescues of active caches.

If you adopt or rescue a cache, contact QPWS to update the contact details for that cache. You may be required to submit a Geocaching application form.

6. Unauthorised caches

6.1 Unauthorised caches in suitable areas

If QPWS staff locate unauthorised caches in areas suitable for geocaching activities, they will contact the owner of the cache and notify them they have 30 calendar days to either submit a geocaching application form or remove the cache. After 30 calendar days, if the cache has not been registered or removed, QPWS staff will remove and destroy the cache and notify the cache listing website.

6.2 Unauthorised caches in unsuitable areas

If QPWS staff locate unauthorised caches in areas that are not suitable for geocaching activities, they will remove the cache and notify the owner and cache listing website it will be available for collection from the local QPWS office for 30 calendar days. If the cache is not collected within this time it will be destroyed by QPWS staff.

6.3 Cache owners contact details not recorded in 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.

7. Register of approved caches

Local QPWS staff will maintain a standardized register of approved geocaches (and copies of photographs where provided). A Geocache Register template is available from the Tourism and Visitor Management Unit.

8. Cache security

QPWS accepts no liability for lost, stolen, damaged or destroyed caches. This includes caches damaged or destroyed as a result of planned back-burns or any other management activity. QPWS will not provide individual notification of management activities to geocachers.

The cache owner will assume all responsibility for cache maintenance, including being responsible for physically checking the cache periodically and when a problem has been reported by another geocacher.

9. Photographic monitoring of cache locations

9.1 Voluntary monitoring

Geocachers are strongly encouraged to take photographs of sites prior to cache placement and periodically throughout the life of the cache. Provision of these photographs will assist QPWS staff to monitor geocaching sites within current resource levels.

9.2 Mandatory monitoring

Submission of monitoring photos to QPWS will be required:

- Where QPWS staff stipulate the submission of photographs at pre-determined intervals as a condition of placement consent (sensitive areas).
- If geocachers submit a geocaching consent form to leave a cache in place following expiration of the original consent term.

10. Caching events

If you would like to conduct an organized caching event, such as a Mega Event or Cache-In Trash-Out event, download a Group Activity Registration Form from nprsr.qld.gov.au and email it to QPWS Park Enquiries.

11. QPWS contacts

QPWS Park Enquiries – info@nprsr.qld.gov.au

12. Attachments

12.1 Procedure for geocache placement in QPWS managed areas

12.2 Geocaching Application Form

12.3 Geocache Information Sheet