

Geocaching – An Increasing Recreation Use

What is geocaching?

Individuals and organizations hide caches all over the world and share the locations of the caches via GPS coordinates available on the internet. Caches are typically plastic containers that contain a logbook and various “rewards”. When a person finds a geocache they typically take something from the cache, leave something in the cache, and write about it in the logbook. There are many web sites that contain information about geocaching. One of the most informative web sites is www.geocaching.com.

What is Region 3’s policy relative to geocaching?

Neither national nor Region 3 official policy exists. Geocaching can be a legitimate use in many parts of the National Forest. Areas where geocaches are not appropriate include designated Wilderness, as well as sensitive areas such as riparian zones, archeological sites, and important wildlife habitats. Several regulations in 36 CFR 261 Subpart A – [261.9(a), 261.9(g), 261.10(f)] could have relevance to management of geocaches depending on the circumstances.

Several Regions and National Forests have information available to the public on their web sites. This is a very good avenue to provide information to this tech savvy user group.

The following are guidelines that may be helpful to the public:

1. Check with the appropriate Ranger District to identify any concerns or special restrictions they have that affect the placing of geocaches.
2. Geocaches should not be placed where damage could be caused to cultural or natural resources from the activities of placing or finding a geocache.
3. Placing geocaches in Wilderness is discouraged. This is because Wilderness is a place where evidence of people should not be noticeable, and natural conditions should dominate the area. A virtual geocache may be an acceptable alternative to placing a real geocache in designated Wilderness. Again, check with the local Ranger District for any concerns or restrictions they may have.
4. Follow Leave No Trace concepts which can be found at:
<http://www.lnt.org/programs/lnt7/index.html>.

Why is geocaching discouraged in Wilderness?

Geocaching is discouraged in Wilderness because of direction in the Wilderness Act, Forest Service policy, and leave no trace concepts:

1. The Wilderness Act - Wilderness is defined in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Portions of the definition that discourage geocaching include, that wilderness is an area “...where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Another part of the definition states that wilderness is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which “...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable....”
2. Forest Service Policy

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- a. Forest Service Manual 2320.3, #4. Cease uses and activities and remove existing structures not essential to the administration, protection, or management of wilderness for wilderness purposes or not provided for in the establishing legislation.
 - b. Forest Service Manual 2323.14 - Visitor Management. Plan and manage public use of wilderness in such a manner that preserves the wilderness character of the area.
3. Leave No Trace concepts – The well known rule is “Pack it in, pack it out.”