

## Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority Geocaching Guidelines- April 2011

- I. Purpose: Geocaching, letterboxing, and other similar activities are allowed in many NVRPA parks. Guidelines have been established to assure good stewardship of the natural and cultural resources in the parks.
- II. Definitions from Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia:
  - a. Geocaching is an outdoor treasure-hunting game in which participants (called “geocachers”) use a Global Positioning System receiver or other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers (called “geocaches” or “caches”) anywhere in the world. A typical cache is a small waterproof container containing a logbook and “treasure” (usually toys or trinkets of little monetary value). Variations of geocaching are Earthcaching, Cache-In Trash Out, Event Caching, and others.
  - b. Letterboxing is an outdoor hobby that combines elements of orienteering, art and puzzle solving. Letterboxers hide small, weatherproof boxes in publicly-accessible places and distribute clues to finding the box in printed catalogs, on websites, or by word of mouth. Individual letterboxes usually contain a logbook and a rubber stamp. Finders make an imprint of the letterbox’s stamp on their personal log book, and leave an impression of their personal stamp on the letterbox’s logbook- as proof of having found the box.
- III. Guidelines: Geocaches may be placed in any park area with prior approval and as long as they adhere to the following guidelines. As with any activity on parkland, the NVRPA reserves the right to place reasonable restrictions on the time, manner or place in which an activity is conducted.
  - a. Requests to place a geocache, letterbox, etc. on NVRPA property must be done in writing to the appropriate Park Manager. Please visit our website [www.nvrpa.org](http://www.nvrpa.org) for a complete list of parks and manager’s e-mail addresses. All requests must include:
    - i. The name, address, and phone number of the cache owner;
    - ii. The e-mail address of the cache owner;
    - iii. The exact proposed location of the cache to include: coordinates and a physical description (photographs are helpful) of the location (may require on-site visit with Park Manager to show location, as needed);
    - iv. The web address of where the cache will be advertised;
    - v. The expected length of time the cache will remain in the park;
  - b. Geocaches shall only be located in developed park areas that have existing uses, trails, and established access points. Geocaches shall not be placed more than 25 feet away from a maintained trail or developed park area;
  - c. Developed areas may include parking lots, roadways, athletic fields, picnic areas, etc.
  - d. Established/maintained trails are considered either asphalt, concrete, gravel, mulch, or park established trails. Casual or wildlife trails are not considered maintained trails.

- e. The intent of this guideline is to protect the park's natural and cultural resources. Trails are a disturbance in natural ecosystems. Any additional disturbance by going off trail can increase the dispersal of invasive plants, cause damage to underlying vegetation, and disturb wildlife. From the protection of cultural and natural resources perspective, the NVRPA does not generally authorize people to go off trail.
- f. Geocaches shall be a minimum of 50' from private property. It is the responsibility of the geocacher to be aware of property boundaries
- g. Geocache locations must be accessible from a safe and legal parking location. If not readily evident, cache owners should include recommended parking directions on their cache pages.
- h. The movement of already downed leaves, twigs, and pieces of bark to conceal geocaches is allowed. The NVRPA prohibits the movement of rocks, removing bark, and/or relocating a living plant. It is prohibited to excavate soils, cut vegetation, move or remove archaeological or natural objects (including living plants, animals, minerals, fungi, artifacts or features, etc.). Human-made objects of non-archaeological significance (e.g. a plastic water bottle) are considered trash and may be removed without prior notice or permission from the NVRPA.
- i. Geocaches shall not be attached to any living or non-living natural resources in such a way that there is any possible damage to the resource. Loosely attached containers that do not restrict growth or cause damage to the resource may be used. Any attachments such as string, twine, wire, or tie wraps that cinch tightly to the resource are prohibited.
- j. Geocaches shall not be attached to any man-made park amenities in such a manner as to damage the object or to impede its proper usage. The physical placement or attachment of caches to any buildings, sheds, or signs is prohibited. The use of data imprinted on the signs as offsets for coordinates is allowed. Alteration of the sign in any way is prohibited.
- k. All geocaches must be marked as such on the container; Surplus ammunition cans are prohibited.
- l. Geocachers must abide by all NVRPA rules, regulations, and other restrictions. This specifically includes park access times. Unless posted otherwise, all NVRPA parks are open from dawn to dusk. Night caching in NVRPA parks is expressly forbidden. Cache owners should include wording stating the acceptable caching hours in their cache pages.
- m. Caches shall only be placed in safe locations not unduly causing patron risk. Geocachers must review the topography of the location where the cache is to be placed and the potential safety risks to the patron trying to find the cache.
- n. Geocachers must strive to cause no damage to the grounds or vegetation that may result from cache searchers accessing the location. If damage is noted, the geocacher must contact the NVRPA for further information.
- o. As with all activities on park land, the geocacher assumes some risk in undertaking their activity. The NVRPA is in no way responsible for any damage to or loss of caches or equipment that is caused by others. The

NVRPA reserves the right to have cache owners or NVRPA staff remove any non-compliant caches. The NVRPA will remove and dispose of all unauthorized caches if unable to contact the owner of the cache to remove it themselves.

- p. Caches placed on NVRPA land without written permission prior to May 2011 are subject to review and may be removed if they are found to be non-compliant with NVRPA guidelines.