

Geocaching in Lake Metroparks

Geocaching is, at its core, simply a game of hide and seek. The word “geocaching” is formed by two simple words. The first part, “geo” means “Earth” or “geography” and the second part, “caching” means “a hiding place used for storage.” The basic concept is to hide a cache (usually a watertight container such as an ammo box or PVC pipe cut to size) filled with a logbook and some small prizes. The latitude and longitude for the cache site is then recorded and published for all who might be interested in finding the cache. When the cache is located, the geocacher is expected to log his/her visit in the logbook and optionally exchange a small prize for another. Proper geocaching etiquette dictates that if an item is taken, then an item is left (i.e. take a small whistle and leave a compass).

Types of caches

How a cache is placed is limited only by the cacher's imagination, but the following is a list of common ways to place a cache (each has strengths and weaknesses):

Typical cache: One container is hidden with clues leading to the location of the cache.

Multi-stage cache: Multiple caches are scattered over a predetermined area (i.e. five parks or all the overlooks in one park). The initial clue leads to the first cache where the clue for the next cache is located, etc. The final cache contains the actual logbook and prizes. This type of cache is great for directing people to many interesting sites or parks, but can ultimately create the need for additional monitoring.

Virtual/mystery cache: This type of cache does not involve a physical container (thus no logbook or prizes), but rather coordinates to a point of interest. This type of cache is particularly useful if an area is too sensitive or dangerous to place a physical container, but a cacher still feels that the site would be of interest to geocachers.

Cache in, Trash out

The park district supports the concept of Cache in, Trash out and encourages geocachers to pick up trash while geocaching. Small garbage bags will be periodically placed in park district caches to promote trash clean up among the geocaching community.

Cache Announcements

Coordinates and clues for caches can be found on lakemetroparks.com and geocaching.com. The park district will not promote or otherwise publish the coordinates of caches unless properly permitted.

Permit Application

Any cacher who wishes to place a cache in Lake Metroparks must first fill out a permit application. The cacher must provide his/her name, address, proposed cache coordinates, and a brief description of the cache and its contents.

Duration of permit/cache

Physical caches can be placed at a particular location for up to one year beginning March 1 and ending on March 1 of the following year. All caches must be removed by March 1 regardless of the date they were placed and a new permit application filled out if the cacher wishes to place the cache again. If a cacher receives a new permit for a cache, he/she will be required to move the cache to a new location. Virtual caches may exist indefinitely; however, the park district retains the right to ask for its removal if conditions in the area of the cache deteriorate.

Cache locations

Lake Metroparks will predetermine the parks and places available to cachers. Cachers will not be permitted to place caches in sensitive areas that include (but are not limited to) preserves, bogs, rookeries, steep inclines and ravines, and areas containing endangered species. Caches will not be placed underground or in places that require disturbance to the environment to locate. Places that should be considered for a cache include (but are not limited to) places with very little vegetation, rocky or hardened topography, and/or trails already established. A cache will not be more than 100 feet off of an established trail and will be easily accessible using the park district's network of trails. The cacher will encourage all geocachers searching for his/her cache to follow the trails as often as possible. The cache itself will be clearly marked on the outside identifying it as a geocaching cache and information about geocaching will be placed inside the cache for anyone who might stumble upon it by accident.

Cache prizes

Acceptable prizes may include (but are not limited to) office supplies, games, toys, maps, tools, hiking or orienteering equipment, and other family-friendly items. Unacceptable prizes include (but are not limited to) food or scented products, alcohol, tobacco products, firearms, drugs, explosives, pornography, and any other dangerous and/or adult items. If any unacceptable item is found in a cache, it will be removed.

Responsibility of cacher

The cacher is responsible for placing, maintaining, and monitoring his/her own cache. If a cache has been determined to conflict with the park district's mission statement or its rules and regulations, the cacher is required to move or remove the cache immediately. Occasionally park volunteers may visit the site of the cache to determine its impact on the surrounding environment and to make sure the contents of the cache are in compliance with the park district's rules and regulations.

Grounds for cache removal

If the area around a particular cache is showing signs of excessive wear, the cacher will be required to move or remove the cache. If a cache has been determined to conflict with the park district's mission statement or its rules and regulations, the cacher will be required to move or remove the cache immediately. If the cacher fails to remove the cache within one week of notification, the park district retains the right to remove the cache and dispose of it and its contents.

Permit Application

A permit to place a cache will cover one full year beginning March 1 and ending March 1 of the following year. A cache placed at any time after March 1 must still be removed by March 1 of the following year. A cacher may apply for a permit every year, but the year following the successful placement of a cache, his/her permit will be automatically rotated to the bottom of the list in order to give other cachers the opportunity to place a cache.

Site assessment

The park district will review each permit based on environmental impact, safety, and the park district's mission statement and rules and regulations. If a site is deemed unsuitable, the permit will be denied and an explanation given to the applying cacher. The cacher will then be given the opportunity to make any corrections or changes to bring his/her application into compliance.

Parks where geocaches are permitted:

- Girdled Road Reservation
- Chapin Forest Reservation
- Hell Hollow Wilderness Area
- Hogback Ridge Park
- Chagrin River Park
- Others upon request. Subject to review.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are several ways volunteers can assist the park district with its geocaches:

- *Assess new cache sites:* Locations for new caches must be assessed before a geocaching permit is issued. Volunteers armed with a list of criteria can check each site using the coordinates given on the permit application and determine the appropriateness of a potential cache site.
- *Monitor environmental impact:* Once a cache has been placed, it is important to make sure that the environment is not adversely affected. Volunteers will visit each cache site at least once a month to gauge the condition of the areas surrounding a cache. If they deem a place to be too adversely affected, they can recommend the cache be moved or removed.
- *Monitor cache contents:* The contents of a cache must be family friendly and must be periodically checked for compliance. Volunteers visit each cache at least once a month to check its contents. If an inappropriate item is found in a cache, the item will be removed and reported to Lake Metroparks' staff.

For more information or to volunteer assisting with geocaching programs or developing new Lake Metroparks sponsored geocaches, email geocaching@lakemetroparks.com.