ROXBOROUGH STATE PARK GEOCACHING AND LETTERBOXING POLICY

Purpose
The purpose of this policy is to have carefully placed and well-regulated geocaches and letterboxes that can be consistent with Roxborough State Park's priorities of visitor safety and natural and cultural resource protection. Roxborough State Park ("Park") will evaluate this policy within a year of adoption to determine whether the Park should continue, amend, or abandon the policy.

Background
Geocaching and letterboxing are games in which a person ("owner") hides a container and posts the location on the internet. People who find the cache write in a logbook and can take an object from the container if they leave one in exchange. Geocaching involves Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates and requires a GPS unit, while letterboxing relies on descriptions. Several variations exist, including log-only micro caches, metal tags, and virtual caches. Virtual caches lead people to views or objects, i.e. nothing physical is hidden.

Prior too this policy, geocaches and letterboxes were not permitted within the Park. However, staff was aware of several caches placed without authorization. Staff has not removed caches while studying the issue. As of the adoption of this policy, the Park had received one request for physical caches and another for a virtual cache.

Letterboxing and Geocaching have potential to allow Roxborough visitors to enjoy a new, low-impact activity at the Park. Park policies requiring visitors, and thus caches, to remain on designated trails may be unattractive to some core enthusiasts, but others may enjoy the challenge of devising, hiding, and finding low impact caches. Letterboxing in particular appears to be very family-friendly, as it does not require GPS equipment. The Park could benefit from the additional exposure on websites describing cache sites. Cherry Creek, Golden Gate Canyon, and Chatfield State Parks permit letterboxing and geocaching.

The potential pitfalls of permitting the activity are the natural resource impacts it may create, potential risks to visitor safety, and potential conflict with Park interpretive and educational efforts. The Park also takes on additional workload, responsibility and liability by approving the activity. Visitors generally assume that a sanctioned activity has a certain level of safety, but the Park cannot ensure that a cache is safe to open or search for at any particular time. Park interpretive efforts stress remaining on the trail and a general practice of low-impact, "leave no trace" outdoor ethics. Encouraging visitors to search for caches and leave items within the park could contradict these efforts. The additional workload involved in approving and regulating caches could offset any revenue gains from drawing geocache and letterbox enthusiasts to the Park.

Colorado Springs does not permit physical caches, citing the "…potential liability for the City, however small, in the event that someone is injured due to a tampered geocache." More Roxborough-specific safety issues are the prevalence of poison ivy, and the possibility that crouching down and reaching for caches may put someone in a more risky position in terms of conflicts with both rattlesnakes and mountain lions. Scented items left in caches could attract wildlife, including black bears, creating potential conflicts with cache seekers. Several local agencies permit no geocaching at all or regulate it carefully, citing natural resource impacts.

The policy seeks to minimize negative impacts by limiting the total number of caches, carefully evaluating approved locations, and providing for removal of caches when the Park deems it necessary. Limiting the number of caches should not adversely affect the recreational benefits. A recent University of Michigan study found that the "majority of geocachers find, rather than hide, caches…." (USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station) The annual permit process may address equity issues inherent in managing a limited resource. Requiring the renewal of cache permits can allow new cache owners to participate even after Roxborough reaches the determined capacity. Requiring annual renewal will also help ensure that caches are maintained and that the Park has current contact information for cache owners.

Permits
Anyone wishing to place a cache must first apply for an annual permit. The application will include full name and contact information of responsible individual ("owner"), exact location of proposed cache, container type and size, and all websites on which the cache will be posted. If using a multiple or offset cache, information must be provided and approved or denied for each location on the Park. The Park will consider and approve or deny requests on a case-by case basis.

Permits will be issued on an annual basis. Applications for 2005 will be accepted immediately upon adoption of the policy. Applications for subsequent years will be accepted and considered beginning in September of the preceding year (e.g. Applications for 2006 will be considered beginning September 2005.) This is designed to allow time for potential cache owners to check their proposed sites for poison ivy.

Permits can be revoked for failure to comply with Park policy.

Renewal for existing permits is not automatic, however the application requirements for renewal applications may be streamlined. Park staff will weigh factors including total number of applications and any compliance issues in determining whether to renew permits. If a renewal permit is not granted, the owner will be given 30 days to remove the cache and website entries. After 30 days, Park staff will remove and dispose of the cache.

No more than 10 physical caches will be permitted each year. Individuals will not be granted permits for more than 2 physical caches each year. The Park will issue as many permits for virtual caches as it deems appropriate. For 2005, applications will be considered in order of receipt. In subsequent years, the Park will evaluate applications received in September/October on the criteria below, then applications received in November/December, and so on until the limit is reached. If the Park receives more than 10 physical cache applications for two years, then the approval process for following years will be re-evaluated.

The Park will remove and dispose of caches placed without the appropriate permit. Owners of unauthorized caches may also be cited for unlawful abandonment of property.

Cache Location/Natural Resource Impacts

Caches must be reached without leaving designated park trails. Areas chosen should have a very minimal environmental impact (i.e. not along a stream corridor, no digging, or destruction of vegetation, etc.) and should consider visitor safety, avoiding poison ivy or other hazards.

The owner of the cache is required to inspect the area at least quarterly, and report any environmental impacts (i.e. soil compaction, foot trails, cutting vegetation, digging, etc.) to the Park. If negative impact is being created, the cache should be removed immediately and updated on the proper website. If the owner reports the need to move the cache, the Park may approve an alternate location for the remainder of the permit period.

Park staff may remove a cache in the case of excessive natural resource impacts. In this case, the owner will be notified, and if Park policy has been followed, the Park may approve an alternate location for the remainder of the permit period.

Cache Labeling/Contents

Containers will be labeled on the exterior as geocaches or letterboxes and the Roxborough permit # will be legibly displayed. To avoid alarming visitors unaware of the game, ammunition boxes will not be used.

No harmful, illegal, or obscene items/substances will be cached. Examples include, but are not limited to—guns, knives, explosives, drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc.

To avoid wildlife conflicts, no food or other scented items that could be attractive to wildlife should be placed in a cache.

Caches should include information explaining that the above items are prohibited.

Preference in granting permits will generally be given to virtual caches or small, log-only containers based on the potential resource damage created by attempts to conceal larger containers and risks to visitor safety that could be posed by unauthorized items within a cache.

Park staff will remove and dispose of items that do not fit within the approved container.

Information

As part of the approval process, cache owners agree to post information on the appropriate websites to allow seekers to remain in compliance with Park policy and assist them in navigating safely. This information will include: the State Parks pass requirement; the Park closure to pets; requirement that seekers remain on trail; and a caution about poison ivy and rattlesnakes. As a convenience to cache owners, the Park will provide a sample write-up on request.