

POLICY & PROCEDURES MANUAL

Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department

Category: Key Business

Policy Name: Geocaching

It shall be the policy of the Parks and Recreation Department to encourage positive use of its parks and resources. Geocaching can be a positive recreational activity when practiced under established conditions and procedures.

Procedures:

Geocaching is initiated by an individual hiding a cache, (normally a waterproof container with small items inside) then recording the location with a Global Positioning Unit (GPS). The individual then posts the GPS coordinates along with a description of the cache on a Geocaching website. Other individuals then try to find the cache. When it is located, participants sign a logbook, then take or leave a small item. The following procedures shall apply to the placement, discovery and management of geocaches.

1. A permit is not required for the placing or searching for geocaches within Santa Clara County Parks.
2. Placing and searching for geocaches may only take place during normal park hours in park areas open to the public.
3. Caches must be registered on the Internet with Geocaching.com.
4. Caches must comply with all guidelines established with Geocaching.com.
5. All caches must be clearly labeled either on the exterior or within as a "Geocache" and include a note describing the activity to an unintentional finder.
6. Contact information for the owner must be included in the cache.
7. Caches must not be placed so as to encourage the development of new "volunteer" trails

8. Caches must not be placed in locations that will encourage erosion or trail damage, or further than 20 feet from a trail edge.
9. Caches may not be buried, or located within a water body.
10. Cutting or modification of vegetation is prohibited.
11. Modification of geographical features is prohibited.
12. Altering park signs, fences, posts, trails, trail markers or any park building is prohibited.
13. Caches may not be placed on or near potentially hazardous locations.
14. Caches must not interfere with wildlife or other park visitors.
15. Caches may not contain inappropriate, hazardous or illegal materials such as flammables, explosives or food.
16. Caches may not be located on or in park buildings or structures or within designated historic or cultural resource areas.
17. Caches must be maintained by the owner. Caches that have been abandoned and not maintained will be considered as litter and removed.
18. The Department reserves the right to remove any cache that has been determined to be inappropriate either in location or content, hazardous or has an impact to other park visitors, park neighbors or natural or cultural resources.

Geocache Management:

A member of Geocachers of the Bay Area will be selected to serve as a member of the Department's volunteer Coordinating Council. This volunteer, with coordination with the Department's Volunteer Coordinator, will be responsible for coordinating a "GeoWatch" group. The "GeoWatch" will be a group of concerned volunteers interested in Geocaching. The "GeoWatch" will monitor Santa Clara County Parks for caches that have been inappropriately placed or do not meet the Department's guidelines for Geocaching as outlined in this policy. In addition, the GeoWatch Coordinator will work with park staff to identify inappropriate geocache locations within parks and identify these locations on a map overlay available to geocachers. Monitoring and disposal of inappropriate caches within Santa Clara County Park boundaries will conform to the following guidelines:

1. Volunteer GeoWatch Monitors will be identified for each park. The monitors will set up "watch lists" of geocaches for their respective assigned parks.
2. GeoWatch Monitors will place all caches in their respective park(s) into a "watch list" at geocaching.com. This will cause geocaching.com to automatically email the monitor a copy of every log for those caches (i.e.- whenever a geocacher finds or cannot find a given cache). Monitors will see these logs whenever they read their normal email.

3. Monitors are not automatically informed of new caches in their park(s). They will need to periodically use the mapping tools available at geocaching.com to check for new caches and add them to their "watch list".
4. Monitors should review their watch list emails at least weekly. If any issues are discovered, they should be reported to the GeoWatch Coordinator via email or phone if urgent. Monitors should check for new caches in their parks on a monthly basis.

Procedures for Removal of Caches

Geocachers typically report caches requiring attention by posting comments in their logs on geocaching.com. These comments are automatically emailed to the cache owner, and will also go automatically to GeoWatch Monitors.

In certain cases, geocachers can file a "should be archived" log. This log will be sent not only to the owner and the GeoWatch Monitors, but will also be sent to the geocaching.com volunteer reviewers. The geocaching.com volunteers can summarily remove caches from the site.

An "abandoned cache" is one that (1) needs maintenance or replacement, or that needs to be moved and (2) is not receiving that attention in a timely manner.

If a cache is a hazard (draws people to a dangerous cliff or to posted off limits areas, etc.) it should be archived as soon as practical. If the cache has some other issue (is visible from the trail or not in compliance with policy) should be addressed with less urgency, but should be archived.

Procedure for GeoWatch Volunteers:

1. If a GeoWatch Monitor sees that a cache has a compliance issue, the monitor should inform the GeoWatch Coordinator.
2. The GeoWatch Coordinator will inform the cache owner of the compliance issue.
3. If the compliance issue is not resolved in a timely manner, the GeoWatch Coordinator will take steps to resolve the situation. Depending on the issue, this may involve requesting a GeoWatch volunteer to fix the issue, or the GeoWatch Coordinator may submit a "should be archived" log for the cache. This latter action will get the attention of the geocaching.com reviewers who can pull the listing for the cache from the website.

4. If caches are physically removed from the parks due to this procedure, the GeoWatch Coordinator, or his delegates, will take reasonable steps to inform the cache owner, and to return the cache to the owner.

Procedure for Park Staff:

1. If park staff discover compliance issue regarding a cache that is an immediate hazard to life, property or endangered species they are authorized to immediately remove the cache.
2. Park staff are encouraged to return any removed items to the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator in turn, should inform the GeoWatch Coordinator, who will take reasonable steps to inform the cache owner and to return the cache to the owner.
3. If park staff find a compliance issue regarding a cache that does not require immediate resolution, they should inform the Volunteer Coordinator, who should then inform the GeoWatch Coordinator of the compliance issue for resolution.