

GEOCACHING AND AUGMENTED REALITY GAMING IN REGIONAL PARKS

Effective Date: March 10, 2022

Replaces: February 13, 2014

Approved By: Mike Redpath, Director, Regional Parks 

PURPOSE

To provide direction to staff and the public on application, review, approval, placement, and installation of geocaches and related elements which support geocaching and augmented reality gaming. This policy is intended to guide the behaviours of those participating in geocaching or augmented reality gaming in Metro Vancouver Regional Parks.

DEFINITIONS

“Augmented Reality Gaming” refers to activities where participants use software applications on smartphones or tablets, location technology and mapping to combine games with the real world;

“EarthCache” refers to a special type of geocache one can visit to learn about an area’s unique natural features, cultural history or geology, they are typically based on lessons developed by educators within the community;

“Geocaching” means an outdoor treasure hunt activity whereby *geocachers* place a hidden container called a cache at an outdoor location then publicize the cache's geographic coordinates on the Internet. Other geocachers locate previously hidden containers using a portable Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or smartphone to upload the coordinates and cache descriptions which assist them in navigating to each site. Physical caches can contain a logbook, pen, and occasionally small items for trade;

“Munzee” is a free scavenger hunt game where QR codes have to be found at different places in the real world. The game is similar to geocaching but uses QR code technology, in addition to device GPS location, to prove the find instead of a logbook;

“Physical Stage” refers to any object placed by the cache owner, such as a container or a tag; and

“Scavenger Hunting Activities” means geocaching or augmented reality game, played in a park or along a greenway, in which participants use GPS or smart-device technologies to locate, identify then collect a small object from a cache, answer a question or solve a puzzle.

OPERATING POLICY

POLICY

Geocaching and geospatial gaming in the form of augmented reality are permitted in Regional Parks, where approved by Metro Vancouver. Activities must be conducted in such a manner that the environment in which they occur is not unduly impacted. Participants must adhere to the [Regional Parks Regulation Bylaw No. 1177, 2012](#), regulations and policies. Geocaches specifically, must follow placement and activity [guidelines](#) consolidated by [Geocaching.com \(Groundspeak\)](#) and the [British Columbia Geocaching Association](#).

In the event of any conflict between or among other publically available policies, guidelines or best practices, Metro Vancouver's Geocaching and Augmented Reality Gaming in Regional Parks policy shall prevail in relation.

Specific locations and distances between geocache installations or game identification markers in Metro Vancouver regional parks and greenways are subject to prior approval and will take into consideration, ecological, cultural heritage and operational imperatives.

APPLICATION

This policy applies to geocaching, Munzee, alternative types of scavenger hunting activities, EarthCaches, Pokémon GO and related augmented reality, smart-device games.

This policy applies to all Metro Vancouver regional parks and greenways. Geocaching, scavenger hunting and augmented reality gaming is prohibited in regional park reserves, ecological conservancy areas, areas not open to the public or any other area specifically identified by the Director, Regional Parks.

This policy is precautionary in nature and is intended to preserve natural park features and prevent damage in anticipation of increasing smartphone, tablet or other GPS receiver gaming activity in the future, while supporting these activities as ways that some visitors connect to nature within regional parks.

Organized geocaching events and smart-device gaming activities are permitted at a Metro Vancouver Regional Park site, without a permit, if fewer than 50 people are present. If greater than 50 people events may occur with a Special Event / Special Use Permit and in accordance with the [Regional Parks Regulation Bylaw No. 1177, 2012](#).

Participants are encouraged to visit the "Leave no Trace" website at www.leavenotrace.ca, which provides resources for preparing safe and environmentally respectful outdoor recreation events.

GEOCACHING, MUNZEE, ALTERNATE TYPES OF SCAVENGER HUNTING REQUIREMENTS

PLACEMENT:

- a) Metro Vancouver Regional Parks will only accept 10 new caches within each administrative area each year as prioritized by Groundspeak;
- b) New geocaching locations will be approved through an on-site meeting between the prospective new geocache owner and MV staff prior to placement. Which staff need to be involved depends on proposed locations;
- c) Temporary postings must be on designated park kiosks, in a specified location, and must be easily removed with no residual sticker;
- d) Geocache containers and physical stages of different types of caches must be at least 150 meters apart. However, when required by special ecological or operational circumstance, and at the discretion of Regional Parks staff, greater spacing may be required due to ecological, cultural or operational sensitivities;
- e) Cache and game ID tags must be located no greater than 0.5 meters on either side of a trail and accessible while still standing on the trail surface, approved travel routes or other public areas {e.g. picnic areas};
- f) Cache and game ID tags must be placed in a manner, whereby searching for them, does not result in degradation to the surrounding landscape;
- g) Cache and game ID tag placements must not result in the disturbance of soils, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife structures (e.g. dens, wildlife trees, nesting areas, coarse woody debris in contact with the ground, or other sensitive areas);
- h) Caches, game tags or other labels supporting augmented reality gaming must not be placed within 30 meters from any stream, river, lake, pond, wetland or forested swamp;
- i) Cache and game ID tags must not be affixed to or suspended from trees, located within or in close proximity to habitat areas that are critical to wildlife species conservation (e.g. coarse woody debris, nurse logs, heronries, established raptor nests, nesting sites for birds, reptiles etc.);
- j) Cache and game ID tags must not be placed in proximity of invasive plant species which can be transported from one location to another on the bottom of shoes, clothing, equipment or dog leashes etc. In the event of colonization or encroachment by invasive plant species, to the nearby area, a cache or game ID tag may need to be relocated or removed at the discretion of the Natural Resource Management Specialist;
- k) Cache and game ID tags must not be placed in areas that may put participants or other visitors at increased risk of injury (e.g. cliffs, unstable ground, in close proximity to unstable trees, areas subject to seasonal or flash flooding or traditional bear feeding areas); and
- l) Cache and game ID tag location must not interfere with other approved recreational activities or where it may be contrary to park management objectives.

OPERATING POLICY

SIZE, IDENTIFICATION AND CONTENTS:

- a) In order to minimize damage to regional park natural features all caches and game ID tags must be of reasonably large size so that they are easy to find;
- b) A geocacher must provide a reasonable hint so that the cache is easily found;
- c) All caches must be clearly identified as "Geocache" or "EarthCache" on the outside of the container and the owner's name, contact information, installation date and geographic coordinates must be provided inside the cache; and
- d) Caches must not contain food or any other scented items which may attract wildlife.

CACHE OR GAME TAG LIFESPAN:

- a) Any installation, label or marking placed without pre-approval, proper identification and owner information, any deemed to be located in an inappropriate location, or any that, by concentrating park use, results in unintended and unacceptable damage to park resources is subject to removal. In such circumstances staff will follow the [Regional Parks – Parks Property Reclamation Procedures](#); and
- b) Caches, game tags or other related labels placed in Metro Vancouver Regional Parks are not considered permanent. The owner must visit a cache, game tag or label at least annually to ensure it still complies with this policy. Caches, tags and labels must be removed by the installer, after one-year, if it is determined that they are no longer actively sought.