

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

March 3, 2005

In Reply Refer To:  
2930 (250) P

EMS TRANSMISSION 03/08/2005  
Instruction Memorandum No. 2005-092  
Expires: 09/30/2006

To: All Washington Office and Field Officials  
From: Group Manager, National Recreation Group  
Subject: Geocaching Activities on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Public Lands

**Program Area:** Permits for Recreation on Public Lands

**Purpose:** This Instruction Memorandum (IM) provides general guidance for geocaching activities on BLM managed public lands.

**Background:** Geocaching is an outdoor adventure game for global positioning system (GPS) users. Participating in a cache hunt is an activity designed to take advantage of the features and capability of a GPS unit and enjoy the freedom of access to public land. Individuals and organizations set up caches all over the world and share the locations of these caches on the internet. GPS users use the location coordinates to find the caches. Once found, a cache may provide the visitor with a variety of awards. The visitor is asked to sign a logbook and to leave or replace items they find in the cache. The cache itself is a small waterproof box.

The general website for geocaching is <http://www.geocaching.com/>. When you enter this website you can type in your zip code and see all the cache sites in your area along with the site's latitude, longitude, a narrative description of the site location, the contents of the cache, and sometimes a map. The site also contains listings of new events and activities such as "Cache In, Trash Out" events. Geocaching provides an opportunity to hone orienteering skills, provides the opportunity to get outdoors, and it can be a wholesome family activity. It can also be conducted with minimal impact to the environment when conscientious land use ethics are followed. Even though geocaching appears to be an acceptable activity on BLM managed land, it is an activity that would only be welcome in appropriate locations.

**Policy/Action:** A special recreation permit (SRP) is not required if the geocaching activity complies with casual use conditions. The following conditions apply to casual use: the activity is not a commercial endeavor, the activity complies with land use decisions and designations, (i.e., special area designations and wilderness interim management policy), and it does not award cash prizes, is not publicly advertised, poses minimal risk for damage to public land or related water resource values, and generally requires no monitoring. If you determine the use to be casual but have some concern about the use, such as, placing the caches in Congressionally designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, at cultural resource sites, at areas with threatened or

endangered species, or any other special fragile area, it would be appropriate to issue a “letter of agreement” with special stipulations attached that would address those concerns.

If the geocaching activity or event does not meet the above conditions, the event should be treated as any other organized recreational group or competitive activity or event for which BLM would require the event organizer to obtain an SRP.

The BLM believes that geocaching is an appropriate casual use of public land, but, as use increases or becomes a management issue in a particular area, the following minimum steps should be taken: 1) try to locate a person or group that is responsible for the cache and have them register the cache with the BLM. Make sure the cache is safe and environmentally sound, 2) prepare an environmental assessment or other appropriate National Environmental Protection Act document, 3) issue a letter of agreement or SRP with special stipulations to mitigate concerns, 4) if sites are not registered within a reasonable amount of time after notification, then the cache should be removed from public land, normally, the cache would be determined to be abandoned property after 10 days unless the appropriate authorization has been obtained, 5) monitor the use to assess public health and safety and environmental protection issues, 6) if the activity/sport becomes too large and begins to conflict with other authorized use, appropriate steps should be taken to properly manage the activity.

**Time Frame:** This IM is effective upon receipt.

**Budget Impact:** This IM establishes general guidance on managing geocaching activities. It is expected that most of the activity would be treated as casual use on BLM managed public land, which would not require the issuance of a permit thus lessening the recreation permit workload. Therefore, the impact on the budget should be minimal.

**Manual/Handbook:** This policy is in conformance with the new 2930-1 manual and handbook.

**Coordination:** The contents of this IM has been coordinated through WO-170, The National Landscape Conservation System, BLM State Office Recreation Program Leads; WO-370, National Law Enforcement Office; and WO-240, Cultural Heritage and Paleontology Office.

**Contact:** If you have any questions, please contact Lee V. Larson at (202) 452-5168.

Signed by:

Robert T. Ratcliffe

Group Manager

National Recreation Group

Authenticated by:

Barbara J. Brown

Policy & Records Group, WO-560