Written by Steve Gross-Team Tierra Buena Wednesday, 01 October 2003 16:02 -

This was origionally posted to the mailing list, but everyone isn't on the mailing list....

The Geocaching community was represented by Marc and Julie (Tamo's Clan'Destiny), Brian (Team Snaptek and azgeocaching.com), Christy and Joe (Pet Posse), Mark (Highway Havoc), Bob Renner (Bob Renner), and me. (Did I forget anyone? My apologies if I did. Lately my memory cells seem to be flaking off faster than my dandruff.) The land management agencies represented included the State Historic Preservation Office (which sponsors the Site Steward program), City of Phoenix, City of Scottsdale, Maricopa County, Bureau of Land Management, Tonto National Forest, and the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge outside of Yuma.

I think the atmosphere was very different from the meeting that was held a year ago. I believe this is due to the fact that the land managers recognize that most Geocachers want to practice our recreation in a responsible fashion, and that we have done and continue to do what we can as a "virtual community" to educate others in what our responsibilities are. I would go so far as to say that every land management representative in attendance recognizes the positives in an activity such as Geocaching, and they are willing to support it insofar as it doesn't conflict with the regulations of their respective agencies (and we have to remember that every paid land management representative at that meeting gets their pay from some government agency or other).

I've preached this before here, but it was said repeatedly last night: The best thing we can do to prevent problems is to obtain permission before placing a cache. That's not always the easiest thing in the world to do, and everyone in attendance recognized that. The issues range from trying to figure out which agency is responsible for the area where you want to place the cache, to finding our what that agency's rules are, to finding someone who actually knows what you're talking about and can help you. But it's worth the effort.

Everyone also seems to be aware that not every Geocacher in Arizona subscribes to this mailing list, or is even aware that azgeocaching.com exists, and that people, particularly newcomers, may go off more in ignorance than anything else and do something that they shouldn't. I think it is up to us to do what we can to let new cachers know about resources such as this mailing list and web site. Brian stated that he would

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be updating the links on the web site to reflect some of the new Geocaching policies we have received (and I'll get you the BLM policy tomorrow, Brian). And we hope to be able to put together a starter list of permission contacts for those agencies where we have them.

This seems like a good time to remind everyone of what we came up with after last year's meeting, which got dubbed "Geo-mentoring". If you own a cache, and get a log entry from someone who is relatively new (based on their find count), why not drop them a note welcoming them to Geocaching and letting them know about azgeocaching.com and the listserv? If anyone would like a copy of the boilerplate I use for this, drop me an email.

Random notes: The Phoenix Preserve sounds as though they are going to be enforcing their "no off-trail" policy more strictly. I don't have my copy of the policy with me here, but everyone who attended got a copy, so I hope someone will post it in short order.

Tonto National Forest continues to welcome Geocaching, except in designated wilderness areas and anywhere that would threaten an archaeological site. It is for the latter reason that they "suggest but do not require" that you contact the appropriate District Office before you place a cache within Tonto.

One item that saddened me a little was that Maricopa County Parks and Recreation announced that they are going to be updating their Geocaching policy and eliminate the "two-mile rule". But since they want permission from the Park Supervisor for any caches placed within their parks, I think it might still be possible to work with them if you have a good location that's far enough back from the trailhead and not too far (whatever that means) off the trail. It was nice to hear that the Pet Posse are working with the county staff to see if they might be able to implement a reduced "geocaching-only entrance fee".

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Kofa NWR has some concerns about some specific caches already placed within the Refuge, but Susana Henry, the representative from Kofa, told me she would look into them individually herself. Again, she does not appear to be opposed to caches within the Refuge, so I would advise anyone planning on placing a cache down there to contact her at the refuge first.

The question was raised about obtaining land management permission for virtual caches (the question of whether we can obtain permission for virtual caches from The Powers What Am at geoaching.com is a separate issue and irrelevant to this discussion). There are several perspectives on this from the land management side, but my sense of the consensus was that if the virtual is located in a maintained public place that permission would not be necessary, but if the site is off trail or similar than permission should be requested (although personally I still wouldn't attempt to place a virtual at the Deer Valley Rock Art Center).

Finally, we decided to try something new when we next have a meeting such as this. Since the next best thing we can do (other than getting permission for caches) is to spread the gospel of Responsible Geocaching and educate new cachers, we are going to set up the next meeting as an event cache, and actively seek newer Geocachers as attendees. We will have a lot of details to work out over the next several months, from content to whether we will need to limit attendance, but as it comes together I'll keep you posted. Don't be surprised if it's a year off, though.

What pleases me most about the above idea (which came from Mary Estes) is that it seems to indicate that most land managers no longer see Geocaching as merely a threat against the lands they manage (a sardonic "thanks again" to Christina Leonard of the "Republic" for originally provoking that attitude), but rather as an activity that with some exceptions does have a beneficial place on public lands.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who attended,

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cachers and land managers alike.

Steve

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