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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **'X' marks the spot with Water Rocks! geocaches**

AMES, IA— Hunting for hidden treasure is the stuff of pirate stories. But anyone can summon their inner pirate and join in a real-world hunt looking for treasures hidden right under your nose.

The act of locating these modern-day treasures is called geocaching—an activity that combines global positioning system (GPS) technology with an appreciation for the outdoors. “Geo” is short for geography and “caching” is the process of hiding materials. A geocacher enters the latitude and longitude coordinates of a hidden cache into a GPS device or GPS-enabled phone and then navigates to that site. The cache is a waterproof container with a logbook for finders to sign and sometimes trinkets to keep or exchange. The cache is put back where it was found for the next geocacher to locate.

A treasure map on the Water Rocks! website provides coordinates for Water Rocks! geocaches hidden in nine Iowa state parks. Water Rocks! is a statewide youth water education campaign using a variety of resources to bring an awareness and an appreciation of water. The campaign is working with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to place the geocaches at selected state parks.

Our natural areas contain more than just hidden geocaches. Iowa has 72 state parks, each with distinctive geographical features like limestone cliffs, caves, lakes, loess soil, rivers and rapids. The original Water Rocks! video series “Treasures of Iowa” heralds examples of Iowa treasures in a greater sense. The series follows two bungling pirates seeking treasure. In each episode they are shown a different Iowa

treasure: state parks, seasons, natural resources and more. The pirates are so focused on finding gold and jewels that they can't appreciate these Iowa gems.

Water Rocks! encourages families to get outside and appreciate Iowa's natural resources; taking kids on a treasure hunt at a state park may be a great way to start. The website treasure map contains clues to help with the hunt. For example, this clue is for the Sea Legs cache at Viking Lake State Park in Montgomery County: "N 40 58.378, W 95 02.243 Head down the hill and toward the sand; look to the south for the task at hand."

"Eye patches are completely optional," says Nathan Stevenson, the geocache coordinator for Water Rocks! "The Water Rocks! geocaches are unique because they are educational as well as interactive and fun. The best way to learn about our natural resources is to experience them in nature, and what better place than our state parks?" Stevenson also plays one of the pirates in the "Treasures of Iowa" videos.

To find the Water Rocks! geocache coordinates, go to "Join the Treasure Hunt" on the website: [www.waterrocks.org](http://www.waterrocks.org). Click the X's on the treasure map to reveal the coordinates for the Water Rocks! caches hidden within the state parks; there multiple caches in each park.

There are over two million caches worldwide waiting to be found, tucked underneath downed logs, under signage, or near city landmarks. Visit [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) to join the worldwide organization for free, get coordinates for caches hidden all over the world, report your find, and network with other geocachers. The Water Rocks! geocaches are listed on this website as well. Log on to the site to report found Water Rocks! geocaches.

In addition to geocaching, Water Rocks! includes many ways to learn about soil and water: school visits, music videos, a computer game, informative videos, learning activities, and a teacher summit. Visit the website to learn more and to request a visit from the team: [www.waterrocks.org](http://www.waterrocks.org). Follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

Partners of Water Rocks! are Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Water Center and Iowa Learning Farms.