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**Reports on the work of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names, its divisions, working groups and
task teams since the Tenth Conference**

Report of the USA/Canada Division

Submitted by USA/Canada Division**

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Report of the USA/Canada Division*

Summary

Since the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2012, representatives of the USA / Canada Division have met as often as possible, either at Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) meetings, or Conferences hosted by the Council on Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) in the U.S.A. The two countries continue to work together on areas of shared interest or concern, and share information on toponymic issues whenever the need arises.

Harmonious cooperation continues between the two countries at the state/provincial and national levels. Although administrative structure, policies and procedures differ on the two sides of their boundaries, many of the same issues are common to both, including Indigenous naming; national and international standardization; raising awareness of the importance of authoritative names; promoting the use of official names; and preserving and protecting geographical names as a reflection of culture and heritage. These key topics are the main focus of work in both countries.

Another important aspect of Division members' work is digital geographical names databases and web sites. Effective use of these digital tools makes authoritative names increasingly accessible to an ever-growing user community, and naming authorities can engage in outreach and raising awareness. As part of that effort, the Division continues to engage in on-going efforts to promote the use of official names by companies who engage in conventional and online mapping.

Divisional cooperation and milestones

Since the Tenth United Nations Conference in 2012, Division representatives have met as often as possible. U.S. representatives were invited guests at the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) annual meeting in Québec in 2012, and two representatives of the GNBC gave presentations at the 2013 Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) Conference in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Three GNBC representatives participated in the COGNA Conference in Alaska in 2015 and a member of the GNBC Secretariat gave a presentation at the COGNA Conference in Reno, Nevada, in 2016.

A number of milestones were reached in the Division since 2012. The year 2014 marked 25 years since the Trans-Boundary Agreement between the U.S.A. and Canada, officially titled *The Treatment of Names of Geographical Features Shared by the United States and Canada* was signed, an important example of long-standing and on-going Divisional co-operation. In 2015, the United States Board on Geographic Names celebrated its 125th anniversary, and the Geographical Names Board of Canada is celebrating its 120th anniversary in 2017, in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of Canada.

Activities in the USA

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) celebrated its 125th Anniversary on September 18, 2015, at the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington, DC. The one-day event included a Symposium with invited speakers and an Open House in the Library's Geography and Map Division that highlighted artifacts related to geographic names.

Four informational Fact Sheets on the BGN are available online at <https://geonames.usgs.gov/publications/index.html>. The Fact Sheets are entitled: An Introduction to the BGN; BGN Information Resources; Official Geographic Names for Federal Publications; and BGN "Getting The Facts Straight".

Domestic Names Committee (DNC)

The revised document "Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names" was approved by the Secretary of the Interior. The new document is available at: <http://www.geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/policies.htm>.

In August 2015 the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, who has conjoint responsibility with the BGN by Public Law, changed the name of Mount McKinley in Alaska to Denali. Denali, the highest peak in North America, means the "high one" or "tall one" in the Koyukon (Athabascan)

language. The action resolved a long-standing procedural stalemate wherein the BGN's Domestic Names Committee (DNC) will not take action on a proposed name, or name change, if there is legislation on the name pending before the U.S. Congress. This decision by the Secretary of the Interior was a rare example of a name change implemented directly by a senior official and not through the normal BGN process.

Work continues with the Hawaii Board on Geographic Names to add diacritic marks to the geographic names of that state, thereby reflecting the proper pronunciation of those names.

The U.S. Geological Survey's National Geospatial Program (NGP), which houses and funds the DNC staff, has absorbed budget and staff reductions over the last several years. As a result, the NGP made the decision, with DNC concurrence, to suspend the collection and maintenance of selected manmade feature categories in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). This will affect features such as libraries, museums, and dams. The features that will continue to be maintained will be updated in GNIS on a periodic revision cycle through submissions from authoritative sources, or based on input from volunteers through USGS's National Map Corps. The NGP is adding a capability for agencies to collect and maintain these names in the GNIS as their resources permit.

Foreign Names Committee (FNC)

The Foreign Names Committee (FNC) of the BGN is responsible for establishing policies and procedures for the standardization of foreign geographic name spellings for U.S. Government use. The Committee's membership comprises representatives from five Federal departments and agencies, and meets on a quarterly basis. In addition to formulating standards for foreign nomenclature, the FNC also renders decisions on specific geographic names, reconciling from among a variety of alternatives the most appropriate foreign geographic name spelling for use in an official English-language context. The FNC's decisions relate only to official U.S. Government application, and carry no official weight beyond that context.

Since the tenth UNCSGN, the FNC and its staff have continued the Committee's work plan to augment the content of its Geographic Names Database, which contains official spellings and variant names for foreign geographic areas, high seas water bodies, and undersea features. Among the new capabilities is the addition of non-Roman script forms of names. The database is accessible at the GEOnet Names Server: <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/> hosted by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

Activities in Canada

In 2014, the GNBC adopted an ambitious, forward looking Strategic Plan to guide the Board's activities for the years 2015 to 2020. Key objectives of the Plan included: renewed governance; strengthened policy and research; improved functionality of the national geographical names database; improved Indigenous naming policy, partnership and outreach; a renewed national policy for undersea maritime naming; and increased awareness of the importance of authoritative

geographical names. Nine Working Groups of GNBC members have been formed, and meet regularly to implement the objectives of the Plan, and ensure that the specific goals identified for each objective are met.

In addition, a special “Canada 150” working group is pursuing a joint project of federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada. Commemorative maps will be produced, each based on a different toponymic theme, to be released in both printed form and in an enhanced online version. The first, a map showcasing a selection of Canada’s Indigenous toponymy, will be released in 2017. This map aligns with Strategic Plan objectives to improve Indigenous partnership and outreach, and raise awareness of the importance of geographical names.

To further support the Strategic Plan, the GNBC Secretariat within Natural Resources Canada reviewed and modernized operations to enhance support for the requirements of GNBC members. To streamline data exchange, a more efficient and interoperable geospatial-based data model was implemented in the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB) in 2015. The GNBC Secretariat also developed a more consistent approach to data exchange and processing geographical names decisions. A new web-based private application for data retrieval and editing now provides GNBC members with access to the national view of geographical names records, and the opportunity to manage their own data in the CGNDB. The geographical name search tool on the public web site has also been upgraded, and new features, including a map viewer, have been added to improve the user experience.

The records maintained by the GNBC Secretariat record and preserve the toponymic history of Canada since 1897. A national digitization strategy for GNBC materials was initiated in 2015, to begin scanning the vast collection of Canada’s official naming decisions, letters, documents and maps. This unique and irreplaceable collection is now being scanned for long term preservation of the original material, and to allow on-line access in the future, through a Government of Canada open data portal.

The importance of international activities related to geographical naming is also recognized in the Strategic Plan. Involvement with international naming bodies contributes to several of the strategic objectives, by encouraging standardization, facilitating the sharing of best practices, and providing a forum for exchange of ideas. On-going participation in UNGEGN Sessions and United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names is a key component of that involvement.

Division members and UNGEGN

Since stepping down as UNGEGN Chair at the Tenth UN Conference in 2012, Helen Kerfoot has continued to be involved in the work of UNGEGN, participating in meetings of UNGEGN Working Groups (Exonyms, Publicity and Funding, Evaluation and Implementation) and of the Africa East Division. She has been an instructor at UNGEGN training courses in Indonesia (2012); Madagascar (2013); Algeria (2014); and Tunisia (2015); and Brazil (May 2017).

She presented the keynote address at the Placenames Workshop on the Management and dissemination of toponymic data online at Dublin City University (2012), and prepared a paper on the United Nations, geographical names standardization and gazetteers, for publication by the American Association of Geographers. She was also a presenter at the Toponymy Day of the Salon international du livre d'Alger - SILA (2015) and at the USBGN 125th anniversary celebrations in Washington (2015). Ms. Kerfoot presented: "Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and UNGEGN" in Seoul (2014), published in *Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage* (Kyung Hee University Press, 2015); "Geographical Names – the United Nations and contributions of women" to students at Ewha University, Seoul (2014); and "UNGEGN, national names authorities and cultural heritage" at *Place names as intangible cultural heritage*, organized by the Romano-Hellenic Division in Florence (2015). Her paper "Gazetteers Global: United Nations Geographical Name Standardization" was published in *Placing Names: enriching and integrating gazetteers* (University of Indiana Press, 2016).

Ms. Kerfoot has also continued to support the work of the Task Team for Africa and assisted the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology in its transfer of data from the UNGEGN Glossary to an online database. She has cooperated with the UNGEGN Secretariat in several continuing activities: building the UNGEGN and Conference archival documents on the UNGEGN website; adding data to the UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database; and updating UNGEGN's information on national names authorities. In addition, she participated in the discussions of the Extended UNGEGN Bureau regarding a future Operational Modality for UNGEGN and the relationship between UNGEGN and UNGGIM. In collaboration with staff of the GNBC Secretariat, she also authored a chapter for the UNGEGN Advanced Training Manual to be launched at the 11th Conference.

Members of the Division also collaborate with UNGEGN as a result of positions held by Division Members, including U.S. members Leo Dillon, Trent Palmer, and Roger Payne. Mr. Dillon serves as co-Convenor of the Working Group on Country Names. Mr. Palmer is the liaison between UNGEGN and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), and was also elected as rapporteur at the UNCSCN in 2012. Mr. Payne serves as the liaison between UNGEGN and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). Individual Division members also participate in several of the UNGEGN working groups, and Canadian members participate in the work of the French-speaking Division.

Conclusion

Although formal Division meetings are rare, harmonious cooperation between the two countries of the USA/Canada Division has continued at the state/provincial and national levels since 2012. Issues common to both include: Indigenous naming; national and international standardization; raising awareness of the importance of authoritative names; promoting the use of official names; and preserving and protecting geographical names as a reflection of culture and heritage.

Division members' work increasingly focusses on digital geographical names databases and Web sites, and contributing to national and international geospatial data infrastructures. Through the use of digital tools and by taking advantage of rapidly-evolving technology, naming authorities can engage in outreach and raising awareness. Authoritative names can now be made increasingly

accessible to an ever-growing user community, and through collaboration and sharing best practices, the Division continues its efforts to support and promote the use of official names and geographical names standardization.

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