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MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON TOPONYMIC DATA  
FILES AND GAZETTEERS

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES OF THE UNITED STATES  
AVAILABLE ON INTERNET

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Geographical Names of the United States  
Available on Internet

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The U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is now available via the Internet World Wide Web (WWW). The GNIS WWW site can be found at <http://www-nmd.usgs.gov/www/gnis/> GNIS, developed by the USGS in cooperation with the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), is our nation's official repository of domestic geographical names information. The GNIS database lists the Federally recognized name for almost 2 million features located throughout the U.S. GNIS is the vehicle by which the U.S. BGN implements its domestic geographical names standardization program. Only those feature names identified as official in the GNIS database can be used on Federally published maps and charts. The newly developed WWW site enables anyone with access to the Internet to obtain up-to-date information from the GNIS database. All publishers of maps, charts, and other documents now have instant access to Federally approved feature names. The system's utility extends beyond standardizing geographical name usage. The database identifies the location of features by geographical coordinates--information useful in a wide array of applications. GNIS has helped solve problems in emergency preparedness, delivery and transportation routing, and site selection and analysis, for example. Because historical as well as current documents are researched in compiling the database, genealogists and other researchers of history find the system invaluable. The GNIS database is growing. Names appearing on Federal documents have already been entered into the database. Other sources of information are being researched in an on-going data collection effort. The GNIS WWW site offers online access to the database. Users can query the database by feature name, feature type, State, and county and receive information instantaneously. A file transfer option allows users to quickly and easily obtain standardized digital files by State from the database.

The USGS, through development of this WWW site, is making publicly held data more easily and readily accessible by its owners. As steward of the GNIS database, the Survey is promoting the standardization of domestic geographical nomenclature, and providing a ready and reliable source of feature location information to be used in many applications.

GNIS was developed by the USGS in close cooperation with the U.S. BGN. Established by public law in 1947, the BGN is comprised of representatives from Federal agencies concerned with the publication and printing of geographical names. Its mandate is to standardize geographical name usage throughout the Federal Government. Members include representatives of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Interior, and State; the Central Intelligence Agency; the Government Printing Office; the Library of Congress; and the Postal Service. The GNIS WWW site provides a link to the Defense Mapping Agency's Geographic Names Processing System (GNPS) which contains information about foreign geographical feature names. Additional links include an information page about the BGN and the principles, policies, and procedures for domestic geographical names.

There is a map-based graphical display capability, enabling users to point to specific areas of interest to receive desired information that graphically illustrates location and related feature names as well as a graphical display of stream drainage basin data. There are also links to companion product databases such as obtaining information about topographic maps showing features of interest.

Additional improvement and innovations will be added as user needs and suggestions are evaluated. For example, the United States file of Antarctic geographical names has recently been added.