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**Item 20 of the Provisional Agenda**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS AND THE AIMS AND FUNCTIONS  
OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS**

**Commemorative Naming Practices for Geographical Features in Canada\***

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## COMMEMORATIVE NAMING PRACTICES FOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES IN CANADA

The following look at commemorative naming practices for geographical features in Canada relates to UN Resolution VIII/2.

### I. Guidelines of Canada's names authority - 1897 to 1976

The Geographic Board of Canada was established in 1897. Its *Rules of Nomenclature* were published in 1898 in the *First Report of the Geographic Board of Canada* and subsequent *Reports*. Although naming geographical features after people was not specifically mentioned, one of the *Rules* dealt with the possessive form of a name and the use of an apostrophe.

*The possessive form should be avoided whenever it can be done without destroying the euphony of the name or changing its descriptive application. Where the possessive form is retained, the apostrophe should be dropped.*

In September 1948, the Canadian Board on Geographical Names<sup>1</sup> issued its *Regulations, Principles of Nomenclature and By-laws* as a publication of its own. For the first time, suggestions about the types of people who could be commemorated were given.

*Such names should be applied rarely and only those of eminence, of those who are prominently connected with the life, activities or development of any locality, should be thus honoured. Names of men now dead may be perpetuated, as is seen fitting thus to honour them. ...*

By April of 1955, a provisional revision of the *Regulations, Principles of Nomenclature and By-laws* had been issued. The *Personal Name Principle* had been modified. It now indicated that naming of a geographical feature after a living person was to be avoided.

*Such names should be applied rarely and only those of eminent persons, or those who are or have been prominently connected with the life, activities or development of the locality, should be used. The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should be avoided....*

In 1961, the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN)<sup>2</sup> was created. Jurisdiction over geographical names now belonged to the provinces,<sup>3</sup> instead of

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<sup>1</sup> The Geographic Board of Canada became the Canadian Board on Geographical Names in 1948.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Board on Geographical Names became the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names in 1961.

the federal government. However, geographical names in the territories were still under federal jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, in 1963, the CPCGN issued *Principles and Procedures / Principes et Directives*. The *Personal Name Principle* now read:

***Personal names should not be used unless it is in the public interest to honour a person by applying his name to a geographical feature.***

*The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Ownership of land should never in itself be grounds for the application of the owner's or donor's name to a geographical feature included therein.*

The idea of not naming a geographical feature after a living person continued to be a part of this *Principle*, which remained the same in the next edition of *Principles and Procedures* published in 1969.

Some slight modifications were made to the *Personal Name Principle* in 1976. Again, the idea of not naming a geographical feature after a living person was continued.

***Principle 8 Personal Names***

*Personal names should not be used unless it is in the public interest to honour a person by applying such a name to a geographical feature. Names should be derived from persons who have significantly contributed to the area of the features selected. The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Ownership of land should never in itself be grounds for the application of the owner's or donor's name to a geographical feature included therein.*

Suggested sources of suitable names for commemoration purposes, not included in the 1955 *Regulations* ..., were placed in their own *Principle*.

***Principle 9 Preferred Sources for Names***

*In approving names for previously unnamed features the following sources are recommended: descriptive names appropriate to the features; pioneers, war casualties, and historical events connected with the area; and names from native languages formerly identified with the general area.*

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<sup>3</sup> The provinces were Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland (Newfoundland and Labrador as of 2001), Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan.

<sup>4</sup> In 1961 the territories were the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories. They gained authority over geographical names in their jurisdiction in 1984. The territory of Nunavut was created from part of the Northwest Territories in 1999.

## II. Present situation – 1987 on

By 1987, when Canada hosted the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the *Personal Name Principle* had been modified yet again, but it was also accompanied by another *Principle* on the sources of suitable names for unnamed features. In addition, there were now *Notes* to provide commentary and examples for each *Principle*. The naming guidelines were published in the bilingual publication *Principles and procedures for geographical naming / Principes et directives pour la dénomination des lieux*.

While the idea of not naming a geographical feature after a living person was continued, for the first time a waiting period of “one or two years” for commemoration was mentioned in the *Personal Naming Principle*. However, names of persons, whether alive or dead that were in common local usage, would override both the waiting period and suggestion of suitable name sources. The suggested sources for names remained in its own *Principle*.

### ***Principle 5 Use of personal names***

*A personal name should not be given to a geographical feature unless such application is in the public interest. The person commemorated should have contributed significantly to the area where the feature is located; when such a name is applied, it should normally be given posthumously. The adoption of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Ownership of land should not in itself be grounds for the application of the owner’s name to a geographical feature. However, where names already in common local use are derived from the names of person, either living or deceased, Principle 2 takes precedence.*<sup>5</sup>

***Note 2*** *In recent years most of the provincial names boards and members of the CPCGN have been quite conservative in the use of commemorative personal names, insisting that persons be deceased for one or two years before their names are to be considered for features. ...*

### ***Principle 6 Approving names for unnamed features***

*In approving names for previously unnamed features for which no local names are found to be in use, the following sources are recommended: descriptive names appropriate to the features; names of pioneers; names of persons who died during war service; names associated with historical*

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<sup>5</sup> Principle 2 said the “First priority shall be given to names with long-standing local usage by the general public. Unless there are good reasons to the contrary, this principle should prevail.”

events connected with the area; and names from native languages formerly identified with the general area.

In the 1990 revision of *Principles and Procedures for geographical naming*, the waiting period following the death of a deceased person was indicated as “at least one year”. Subsequent revisions of the national naming guidelines in 1999 and 2001 have retained the same “at least one year” waiting period.<sup>6</sup>

The 2001 version of *Principles and Procedures for geographical naming* is available on the Internet in pdf format at <[http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro\\_2001e.pdf](http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro_2001e.pdf)> in English and in French as *Principes et directives pour la dénomination des lieux* at <[http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro\\_2001f.pdf](http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro_2001f.pdf)>.

## **II. Current provincial, territorial, and Antarctic guidelines on commemoration**

The provinces and territories of Canada have the option to follow the national *Principles and Procedures* or to adapt the national guidelines to suit their own jurisdictional needs.

A few of the provinces and territories have naming policies and/or submission forms on the Internet. Those that do not, in general, adhere to the national *Principles and Procedures*.

Of the jurisdictions with Internet sites, the following is available with respect to guidelines on commemoration. Waiting periods range from none specified to five years.

The Yukon Geographical Place Names Board does not have a published policy on the web, but its *Name Proposal Form* <[http://www.yukonheritage.com/application\\_forms-ygpnb.pdf](http://www.yukonheritage.com/application_forms-ygpnb.pdf)> does ask, “If your proposed name is in recognition of a particular person, is that person deceased?”

There is nothing in the Northwest Territories *Geographic Names Policy* <<http://pwnhc.learnnet.nt.ca/policy/geonames.htm>> to indicate that commemorative naming is now undertaken.

Manitoba <[http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/geomatics/geo\\_names/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/geomatics/geo_names/index.html)> and Nova Scotia <<http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsnr/placenames/namingprocess.asp>> follow the national guidelines of an “at least one year” waiting period.

Quebec follows the “at least one year” guideline as well. The policy can be found at <[http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/poltopo5.htm#Politique de désignation toponymique commémorative2a](http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/poltopo5.htm#Politique%20de%20d%C3%A9signation%20toponymique%20comm%C3%A9morative2a)> on the Commission de toponymie’s web site. It is also in the

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<sup>6</sup> These revisions were mostly administrative changes (such as departmental name or slight modifications to the Notes.

brochure *Politique de désignation toponymique commémorative* available from the Commission de toponymie.

British Columbia's guidelines can be found on the Internet in pdf format at <<http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/bcnames/GeogNamingPolicy.pdf>>. "Use of Personal Names" is found on the fourth page. A minimum two-year waiting period following death is required.

Alberta will not name a geographical feature after a living person and has a minimum five-year waiting period. The Alberta *Geographical Names Manual* with the Alberta naming guidelines can be found at <<http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/heritage/AandH/forms/GeogNamesManual.pdf>>.

Canadian guidelines for naming in the Antarctic were amended in 2002 to require a five-year waiting period for commemoration of a deceased person whose name otherwise fulfills the naming guideline requirements. Previously a waiting period following a death had not been specified. Naming of an Antarctic feature after a living person who otherwise fulfills the Canadian Antarctic naming guidelines is possible, but few instances of this occurrence are expected. No indication of a waiting period could be found in Antarctic naming guidelines of other countries.

### **III. Other organizations in Canada**

The Secretariat of the Geographical Names Board of Canada is represented on the federal Inter-departmental Committee on Commemoration.<sup>7</sup> This committee shares information on commemoration requests (e.g., for a stamp, coin, statue, geographical name, historic site or plaque, etc.) so that all agencies involved in commemoration at the national level are kept informed and can provide advice. Each of the organizations on the Committee has their own guidelines on commemoration. Many do not allow commemoration of a living person, aside from the sovereign. A brochure with brief comments about each member department or agency and contact addresses is being prepared for public distribution.

### **IV. Effectiveness of the current policy**

At the level of the provinces and territories, where most decisions on geographical names are now made, the *Principles and procedures for geographical naming* are followed as a guideline.

However, as specified above in Section II, waiting periods for commemoration of a deceased person range from one to five years as the jurisdiction in question has decided.

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<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names became the Geographical Names Board of Canada in 2000.

There are instances when geographical features have been named after living persons, for example, in Manitoba, six lakes named after Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's grandchildren on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee, another lake named after her cousin, Prince Michael of Kent, and a hill named after His Holiness Pope John Paul II. All of these are considered acceptable under the "in exceptional circumstances" clause.

Both Manitoba and Ontario have, in recent years, received proposals to commemorate individuals very soon after their untimely deaths. In Manitoba, the request was made following the death of a soldier killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina so that the family could be notified of the commemoration at the funeral. In Ontario, a request was made to name features after four employees who worked for the Ontario ministry that supports the work of the Ontario Geographic Names Board. Manitoba has since opted to follow the "one-year waiting period". Ontario will likely look at drafting a commemorative names policy.

British Columbia and Alberta, provinces with lots of mountains, tightened up their naming policies with respect to commemoration because the public seems to feel that it is appropriate to commemorate lost loved ones, particularly after some mishap or tragedy. Both provinces' naming guidelines stress the fact that "geographical features are *not* named to commemorate the victim(s) or to mark the location of mishaps, accidents or tragedies." This aspect of the British Columbia policy was invoked when Michel Trudeau, son of the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was killed in an avalanche in British Columbia a few years ago.

At the national level, no changes to the *Principles and procedures for geographical naming* are foreseen.

Aside from the changes mentioned above, most provinces and territories will continue to adhere to the policy of naming geographical features after deceased persons with a minimum one-year - or more - waiting period. They will likely not make any changes to their commemorative naming practices. But if they should find that their policies need to be tightened up or modified to provide a decision-making framework, the provincial and territorial members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada will consult the policies of their fellow Board members for suggestions as to what works and what does not. Another option is to hold a special meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada in order to discuss problems of commemorative naming practices in order to find a solution.

## **V. Conclusion**

Commemorative naming has been in use in Canada for hundreds of years – even before the existence of a national naming authority – due to early explorers and settlers. Some fifty years after the establishment of this naming authority, principles dealing with commemoration were put into place. While recognizing that there might be exceptional circumstances (such as commemoration in honour of the reigning sovereign), for nearly

fifty years, Canada's naming authority has promoted the avoidance of commemorating living people. And, since 1987, Canada has stated a national waiting period of at least one year to be a suitable length of time following a death before a commemorative name is adopted. At the provincial and territorial level, where the names decisions are made, this period currently ranges from a minimum of one year to a minimum of five years, depending on the jurisdiction.

It is hoped that this history of commemorative naming practices and the principles of commemorative naming as used in Canada may help other jurisdictions in establishing their own.

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