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National standardization: Administrative structure of national names authorities

Administrative Structure of Canada's National Names Authority

Submitted by Canada **

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ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF CANADA'S NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITY

Canada's national names authority is the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC). Members include representatives from every province and territory (13) and from federal departments and agencies involved with archives, mapping and charting, defence, statistics, Indian Reserves, national parks and national historic sites, elections, mail, and translation. The Chair of the GNBC and the Chairs of the Advisory Committees are also members of the Board. However, at present, these positions are vacant. The Board is also served by a Secretariat which is provided by Natural Resources Canada.

In 2004, the GNBC held a session to review the structure and purpose of the Board. A renewed commitment to the Board was required from GNBC members. To achieve that aim the Board tried to deliver what members want while remaining within its mandate.

Membership

The chair of the GNBC and the Chairs of the Advisory Committees are appointed by the federal Minister of Natural Resources, in consultation with the GNBC, as per the Board's Order in Council. Members representing the provinces and territories are appointed through their governments. Federal members not identified in the Order in Council, are also appointed by the by the federal Minister of Natural Resources, in consultation with the GNBC.

Because not all appointed GNBC members are able to attend GNBC meetings and take care of GNBC activities, many have been sending representatives in their place. Letters were sent to all GNBC members asking them to identify, in cases where this situation was likely, a "delegated" member. Such members perform the functions of the position but are responsible for keeping the GNBC member informed.

Meetings

It was decided to reduce the number of days for the meeting from three to two as many members are finding it hard to justify spending so long away from their offices. Demonstrations or special sessions can be accommodated within the two-day meeting period. When necessary, the meetings can be re-adjusted to a longer length should items for discussion merit such a change.

Advisory Committees

The advisory committees were looked at carefully. It was felt that there was some overlap in the mandates of the advisory committees and concern over one that had not met in some time. The decision was made to reduce the number of advisory committees from four (Canadian digital toponymic services, nomenclature and delineation, names of maritime and undersea features, and toponymy research) down to two (nomenclature, policy, and research; and automation and delineation). It is hoped that the new committees will address the overlap in most cases. The

Chairs of these committees and the GNBC are to work in concert to avoid any overlap in agendas. New mandates were approved for the two new advisory committees in 2005 with some slight adjustments made in 2006.

Working Groups

Working groups are created when there are specific needs or purposes. The Delineation Guidelines Working Group was established at the 2005 annual meeting to provide guidelines for delineating (identifying the extent of) geographical features on maps. A preliminary report was presented during the 2006 annual meeting. The group continued its work and will present a further report in August 2007. Other working groups were set up in 2006 but have not commenced work due to lack of a Chair from an advisory committee.

Strategic plan

The GNBC's strategic plan, first developed in 1989 in response to increased pressure on government resources, was updated for a fourth time in 2006. Previous revisions were done in 1993, 1997, and 2001. This handbook for GNBC members includes a brief history of the GNBC, the GNBC mandate, strategic objectives, the current Order in Council, and the mandates of the two advisory committees.

The GNBC mandate is to:

- provide and maintain a framework, which respects socio-cultural heritage and technological advancements for geographical naming activities in Canada, and promote the application of standards and principles
- endorse the geographical name decisions taken by the appropriate federal, provincial, and territorial authorities, and disseminate clear and accurate information on the location, shape, and historical and cultural significance of Canada's geographical names
- approve pan-Canadian names, Antarctic names, and names of undersea and maritime features in areas of interest to Canada; and
- represent Canada in international naming forums and activities related to toponymic standards and practices.

The strategic objectives of the GNBC are to:

- provide a bilingual forum for GNBC members and coordinate the development and sharing of best practices, policies, naming standards, methodologies, research tools, and procedures;
- provide access, in both official languages, to a distributed, authoritative database of Canada's geographical names and their spatial extents, by hosting a single national portal that utilizes emerging technologies;
- promote public awareness of the historical and cultural significance of geographical naming in Canada;
- influence the strategic directions taken by organizations with similar and/or converging interests through cooperative efforts;
- identify and facilitate opportunities for partnerships and funding; and

- provide expertise and leadership in the field of geographical naming standards to the international community through outreach and liaison.

Organization of the provincial and territorial GNBC members

Several provinces and one territory – Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Northwest Territories – work from one-person offices.

The remaining provinces and territories - Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Yukon, and Nunavut - have names authorities that meet at least once a year.

In 2002, within the context of a revision of the mission and mandate of the French Language Charter authorities, the Government of Québec confirmed the status of the Commission de toponymie du Québec as the public authority responsible for the management of geographical names in Québec. While recognizing the autonomy of its mission, the Government maintained the Commission's administrative link to the Office québécois de la langue française.

The Nunavut Geographic Names Committee (NGNC) was created in January 2005. It sits as a subcommittee of the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Katimajiit (a Ministerial committee established to advance Inuit societal values within governance). The Nunavut Geographic Names Committee consists of six members with a Chairperson and Co-Chairperson selected from within. The Committee held its inaugural (orientation) meeting in January 2005.

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