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**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the  
progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Tenth  
Conference (for distribution only).**

**Report of the United States of America**

Submitted by the United States of America\*\*

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\*\* Prepared by Lou Yost, Executive Secretary for Domestic Names, Leo Dillon, Vice Chair, and Trent Palmer, Executive Secretary for Foreign Names, United States Board on Geographic Names

## **Report of the United States of America**

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 "Principals, 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 (Athabaskan) 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.