**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**
New York, 8-17 August 2017
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity

Canadian Indigenous Naming Policy Scan
Geographical Names Board of Canada

Submitted by Canada**

Summary

Canada's national naming authority is made up of federal, provincial and territorial members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC). All Canadian naming jurisdictions welcome and encourage Indigenous participation in the naming process and have consultation policies in place for naming. In early 2017, the GNBC Secretariat commissioned a policy scan to report on Indigenous naming policing of Canadian naming authorities. This paper outlines the findings of the preliminary report.

Policies, procedures and approaches may differ in each naming jurisdiction in Canada, reflecting regional geography, history and circumstances. The Policy Scan provides in-depth information on policy and procedures in each jurisdiction for the collection of Indigenous names. It also describes how Canada's naming authorities approach some unique aspects of Indigenous toponymy including: multiple names for a single feature; use and form of generics; and guidelines for topocomplexes, features made up of more than one feature type, with a single name.

Consolidating this information provides invaluable information to all naming jurisdictions in Canada regarding Indigenous toponymy. A comprehensive summary of policies will allow GNBC members to identify gaps, share best practices, and work together to improve Canada's policy framework on Indigenous geographical naming.

<u>**Canadian Indigenous Naming Policy Scan**</u>

Geographical Names Board of Canada

Background & Objectives

The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) is the national coordinating body responsible for all matters of geographical naming in Canada. As part of their mandate, the federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities of the GNBC work with Indigenous communities across Canada to identify and record traditional Indigenous geographical names that reflect the culture, history and languages of the first inhabitants of the territory. Policies, procedures and approaches may differ significantly in each jurisdiction, reflecting regional geography, history and circumstances.

In the Canadian context, Indigenous rights, including treaty rights are protected in the *Constitution Act, 1982,* which identifies three groups – First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Land claim and Self-Government Agreements typically include rights to maintain Indigenous heritage and culture, including the use of Indigenous geographical names within their exclusive territory.

In early 2017, the GNBC Secretariat commissioned a researcher, David Laidlaw of the Canadian Institute of Resources Law, University of Calgary, to prepare a report, or Policy Scan. The objective was to research, document, analyze and summarize how Canada's federal, provincial and territorial naming jurisdictions identify and preserve geographical names of Indigenous origin. This Policy Scan supports several priority objectives identified in the 2014-2020 GNBC Strategic Plan, including:

- Strengthening policy and research by improving coordination; increasing research and expert consultation; undertaking analysis of policy and research; and improving accessibility to information on tools, standards, and best practices.
- Maintaining a national database of authoritative geographical names, including accurately recording, storing and disseminating Indigenous geographical names by giving special consideration to evolving orthographies; specialized character sets; the naming of topocomplexes; multiple official names for a single feature; and unique cultural generics.
- Expanding database capacity in the context of Indigenous naming by extending the national database to accurately record, store and disseminate unique aspects of Indigenous geographical names.

The focus on Indigenous geographical names also aligns with a commitment by the Government of Canada to establish a renewed relationship with Canada's Indigenous people. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* calls for Indigenous peoples to have the right to designate and retain their own names for communities, places, and geographical features. Recognition and increased awareness of traditional place names contributes to the preservation, revitalization and strengthening of Indigenous histories, languages and cultures. Activities of the federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities of the GNBC are closely aligned with *UNDRIP* and can play an important national role in Indigenous reconciliation.

For each Canadian naming jurisdiction, the Policy Scan examined a series of questions with the goal of identifying the most pressing concerns, and how the GNBC can address any issues or concerns identified. Naming authorities were asked:

- What are your policies for Indigenous name collection?

- Do you have specific procedures for Indigenous names?
- How do you address certain unique aspects of Indigenous toponymy (such as multiple names for a single feature; unique cultural feature types and generics, and the naming of topocomplexes?)

Indigenous Naming Policies

While generally based on the GNBC's *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming*, the policies guiding each jurisdiction's naming practices vary. This variation includes policies respecting the treatment of Indigenous names. All naming jurisdictions have policy guidelines that can accommodate some, but not all, aspects of an Indigenous Name Policy. Most do not have a separate Indigenous Name Policy, although many of them have such a policy in development.

All Canadian naming jurisdictions welcome and encourage Indigenous participation in the naming process and have consultation policies in place for naming. This would include the exercise of naming authorities power to make recommendations to government in certain circumstances such as naming in Indigenous groups' traditional territory.

All naming authorities encourage research of various cultural and linguistic specialists and the greater involvement of Indigenous representatives in an effort to improve knowledge of Indigenous geographical naming traditions. Naming authorities have benefited from various collection and inventory projects that they have supported. In recent years many Indigenous groups across Canada have started projects to collect their own geographical names in Indigenous languages. A number of these projects have already resulted in submissions, and new official names.

The GNBC *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming* calls for naming authorities to consult with and respect local usage for guidance in determining official names. Jurisdictional consultation policies applicable to naming authorities vary in detail and scope, but consultation is generally required, whether mandated by a treaty or land claim agreement, or as part of the process for approving new names. Proof of consultation may be required as part of a proposal for a name change.

Unique Aspects of Indigenous Toponymy

Some naming authorities have developed policies to address unique aspects of Indigenous place naming traditions, as follows:

Multiple names for a single geographical feature

Historically, Canadian naming authorities have adhered to the univocity principle, that is, one official name for one place. However, multiple names for a place or feature are becoming more common, often in recognition of traditional Indigenous names. Multiple names applied to one feature can include: official names in two or more languages, and official and alternate names. As an example, the historical and cultural importance of Canada's longest river, the Mackenzie River in Northwest Territories, is reflected in its seven official names:

Name	Language	Meaning
Dehcho	South Slavey	Big river
Deho	North Slavey	Great river
Fleuve Mackenzie	French	Named for Alexander Mackenzie, European explorer
Grande Rivière	Michif	Big river
Kuukpak	Inuvialuktun	Big river
Mackenzie River	English	Named for Alexander Mackenzie, European explorer
Nagwichoonjik	Gwich'in	Big river

In Yukon, alternate names are used to recognize and preserve the heritage and cultural value of a name. These names may not be in local use, and are used only in certain contexts, such as in tourist publications, or on special purpose maps. Some alternate names are in Indigenous languages, some are formerly official English language names which have been replaced by an Indigenous name.

Official name	Language	Alternate name
Mendocina Creek	English	Tthekál Chú
Dâ Hîni	Tlingit	Weasel Creek

As of May 2017, there are 164 Yukon alternate names identified in the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB). (Official names may have up to four alternate names, in different languages, in areas of overlapping traditional territory.)

In addition, Manitoba recently approved a third official name for Lake Winnipeg, which is also called Lac Winnipeg. The new Indigenous official name is Weenipagamiksaguygun, the traditional Anishinabe name used by the Poplar River First Nation.

Use and form of generics

Indigenous geographical names in Indigenous languages often require new approaches in toponymy. The non-Indigenous toponymic tradition in Canada includes a distinction between the *generic* component of a name, which defines a feature within a fixed class of entities, using a term in a fixed orthography (spelling). The *specific* component identifies the particular feature, in a fixed orthography. In many cases, Indigenous names do not contain a generic term. Many Indigenous languages express names in a relational manner with sophisticated nuances which may modify both the specific, and the generic, where present, leading to changes in orthography. A feature may be named based on a story which is associated with the location, or an activity which takes place there, rather than on its physical characteristics or geography.

The CGNDB was created in the mid-1970s. Its original structure was based on a system of generic codes and terms in a traditional European-style classification system, integrated with mapping specifications used in the production of many map products produced by the Canadian federal government. The original structure worked well for non-Indigenous names. However, although many adjustments have been made over time, significant new approaches and adaptations are now required to incorporate Indigenous concepts, such as non-static names, and new feature classes, into databases, glossaries, and mapping applications.

Guidelines for topocomplexes

Topocomplexes are geographical entities that are made up of more than one distinct feature type, but identified by a single toponym.

Topocomplex: Bay and Cape
Name: Hilaliurvik

English translation: "Where the weather is made." "The place that makes the weather, the wind." "Where one awaits the end of the bad weather."

These named entities do not fit the traditional feature class classifications, which generally divide features into categories and sub-categories based on their composition. In the classification system for the CGNDB, for example, the feature category Water Features has sub-categories such as Flowing freshwater, Standing water surrounded by land, Water sources, and Tidal water features.

Currently, no Canadian jurisdiction has specific guidelines for the delineation or display of topocomplexes, and work is needed to revise generic code and classification systems to include the Indigenous geographical perspective which is reflected in their names.

Accurately recording Indigenous place names

The GNBC's *Guide to the field collection of native geographical names* (1992) includes practical guidance for field studies for data collections in paper form: interview sheets, maps and paper for an Indigenous informant/translator to write names in Indigenous languages including those in syllabic form. Recordings, sound or video are also recommended to capture pronunciation. Subject to the limits inherent in interview methodology, time and resource limits etc., these practices provide best opportunity to accurately record Indigenous geographical names and toponymic approaches. Although the *Guide* is now 25 years old, it is still a useful resource.

Field studies can be the best basis for collecting names and information about local usage. Until recently, most Indigenous languages in Canada were endangered or dying. Many had few native speakers. Today, there are efforts underway in Indigenous communities to revive and preserve their languages, and toponyms can play a role in language preservation. Names and their associated stories and meanings are part of a rich oral tradition. In order to capture this priceless historical and cultural information from elders who hold the knowledge, some naming jurisdictions, as well as cultural organizations and researchers, have been conducting studies in Indigenous communities to gather as much data as possible. These studies will, over time, result in an increase in Indigenous official names.

All naming jurisdictions have a concern for accurately recording official names. The number of separate Indigenous languages in Canada is difficult to determine but the consensus estimate appears to be 50-60 different languages from 10-12 separate language families.

There are two orthographies, or writing systems, currently used in official Canadian Indigenous names. The first is a syllabic system. In Canadian Indigenous languages, syllabic script consists of a symbol which represents a syllable (usually a sequence of consonant + vowel) rather than a single sound, and in which consonants are modified in order to indicate an associated vowel. Syllabics are used for the Inuktitut form of the Inuit language, used mainly in the eastern part of Nunavut.

The second writing system is based on the Roman alphabet, but may also include diacritics and special characters. There is a wide variation in the adaptations and approaches used, by linguists and others, in recording Indigenous names, and no standardized approach exists. Although the adoption of UTF 8 in the CGNDB does allow most characters and diacritics to be represented correctly in various media, there can be difficulties in displaying those names, especially those containing new combinations of characters and diacritics. Jurisdictions will need to work closely with Indigenous groups, and new technical solutions will need to be found.

Conclusion

The information gathered in the preliminary report on Indigenous naming policy among naming authorities in Canada has not previously been available in one source. The final report will be used as the basis for further analysis and study. The answers provided to the questions posed will allow the various naming

authorities to compare their policy with that of others, and learn more about approaches and solutions used in other jurisdictions. Having a comprehensive summary of all Canadian policy will allow the GNBC to identify gaps, share best practices, and work together to improve Canada's policy framework on Indigenous naming.