

Agenda Item 6(d)

The Geographic Names Information System

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The Geographic Names Information System
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The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is an automated names system aimed at the collection and publication of geographical names. It is a multipurpose system developed by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with the United States Board on Geographic Names and provides services at all levels of government and the private sector. The system has been designed to serve as the national names depository of the United States, to assist the National Mapping Program of the U.S. Geological Survey and to provide a basis for toponymic research.

The computer-based system meets a broad spectrum of information and program needs including:

- Cartographic support
- Standard reference
- Geographical base for specialized files
- Special publications
- Digital products and application
- Toponymic and other research
- National standardization.

The use of electronic data processing for capture and storage of large quantities of names data, and sophisticated data retrieval and processing is a powerful tool in any names standardization program. For example, names from the large-scale base map series as well as other official sources at various levels of government can be collected and integrated into one data base that may then be accessed from various offices for purposes of standard names usage. Also, feature name or application controversies can be processed more effectively and efficiently through the system's maintenance program. It is also possible to collect and add historical names and information thereby expanding the usefulness and versatility of the data base. Presently the GNIS is primarily a locative data base, but descriptive and other related types of information is being added, and the potential for names standardization and other applications is enormous.

The attached Data Users Guide for the Geographic Names Information System describes the data elements or basic categories of data available for retrieval from GNIS. Research into enhancements and upgrades of data base compilation, access and maintenance is constantly improving

responsiveness to users and consequently is furthering efforts to promote a program of national names standardization. A viable national names program must be dynamic, and as such requires an electronic data system that is versatile and responsive to many varied research and application needs.

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