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STANDARDIZATION IN MULTILINGUAL AREAS

Some Canadian Activities with Respect to Indigenous Names*

*** Prepared by Kathleen O'Brien, Secretariat, Geographical Names Board of
Canada**

SOME CANADIAN ACTIVITIES WITH RESPECT TO INDIGENOUS NAMES

Since the inception of a geographical names board, Canada has been working to promote indigenous geographical names. Several of the activities are enumerated below.

I. Activities at the national level

Aboriginal names and their treatment according to the *Rules of Nomenclature and Principles and Procedures for geographical naming*

Concerns about Aboriginal names and how they are written has been a concern of the Geographical Names Board of Canada for many years. The First Report of the Geographic Board of Canada, published in 1898, included the following two *Rules of Nomenclature*:

8. *It is desirable to avoid the use of hyphens to connect parts of Indian names.*
15. *The spelling of native geographical names should represent, approximately, the true sounds of the words as pronounced in the native tongue.*

A third rule, although not specific to Aboriginal names, could also be considered applicable –

2. *When names have been changed or corrupted, if not too firmly established by local usage or otherwise, the original forms should be restored.*

The *Rules of Nomenclature* have changed over time and are now referred to as *Principles*. They are found in the bilingual publication *Principles and procedures for geographical naming / Principes et directives pour la dénomination des lieux* which is available in published form. Separate English and French versions are on the Internet in pdf format at http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro_2001e.pdf and http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro_2001f.pdf.

The following three *Principles* and their Notes, from the 2001 edition, apply to indigenous geographical names.

- ***Principle 7, note 3***

Form and character of names

Geographical names should be recognizable words or acceptable combinations of words, and should be in good taste.

Note 3. At one time names that were deemed cumbersome and unpronounceable were shortened or rejected. In recent years, the names

boards have been more open to the approval of names with long specifics.

a) Examples are **Pekwachnamaykoskwawaypinwanik Lake** in Manitoba and **Île Kuchistiniwamiskahikan** in Quebec.

- **Principle 8, note 1**

Language forms and translation

A name should be adopted in a single language form, although other forms may be accepted where in use and when sanctioned by the appropriate names authority. A name should, where possible, be written in the Roman alphabet. A name derived from languages other than English or French should be written according to the considered opinion of linguistic specialists and be acceptable to the appropriate names authorities and the language communities concerned. Names of selected geographical entities of “pan-canadian” significance, as established by Treasury Board in 1983, are recognized in both English and French for use on federal maps and in federal texts.

Note 1. Names of Inuit and Amerindian origin are normally approved in Roman orthography, using the standard letters and diacritics available. In some names of Aboriginal origin in British Columbia, the apostrophe is used to indicate the glottal stop. Examples are 'Adade Yus Mountain and K'i Island.

However, in recent years, some geographical names have been approved using “hard-to-construct” characters which necessitate special coding in the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base until international standards have been approved for such characters. For example, the “L” in **Lutselk'e** (N.W.T.) is coded in the national database as {1}; and the **X** in **Xây Gûn** (Y.T.) is coded as {3}.

- **Principle 12, notes 8 and 9**

Generic terminology

A geographical name usually includes both a specific and a generic element. The generic term in a newly-approved geographical name should be appropriate to the nature of the feature. Its position in the name should be dictated by euphony and usage. The generic term will be recorded in English, in French, or in an Aboriginal language by the names authority concerned.

Note 8. Occasionally a name of Aboriginal origin has, fused with the specific, a generic term that is similar in meaning to the French or English generic of the toponym. Examples are **Mississippi River** (Ont.), **Pekawinneepi** Creek (Man.), and **Lac Matonipi** (Que.). Names such as these are quite acceptable.

Note 9. More jurisdictions are approving generics in Aboriginal languages. Examples are **Vakak Nju** (lake) in the Yukon, **Suzanne Bung'hun** (lake) in British Columbia, and **Pakwatew Ministik** (island) in Alberta.

Publications used to disseminate indigenous names

Decisions of the Geographic Board of Canada and its successors have been distributed through means of various publications. Aside from maps, these publications have been the main method of distributing information about Canadian toponymy whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. The first publications were the *Reports of the Geographic Board of Canada* (19 in all), beginning in 1898 and ending in 1927. The initial *Reports* gave basic information, but later ones also provided information about the names themselves. Many western names have a fair bit of information on their history, such as what maps the names were on, who recorded them, etc. Then there were several *Place-names of ...* publications. A few of these publications (Anticosti Island, Thousand Islands, etc.) were also part of the *Reports*. The *Place-names of ...* publications provided origin information wherever possible. In 1952, the *Gazetteer of Canada Series* was initiated. Volumes in this *Series* contained basic “tombstone” information, but no origins. In the 1970s, two *Toponymy Studies* were published for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. The *Toponymy Studies* were similar in content to the *Place-names of ...* publications, but gave more detail as to which maps the names had appeared on.

Symposium

In 1986, a symposium on Native geographical names was held in Ottawa. Some 27 resolutions resulted. They were published in *Canoma*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1986. Copies are available from the GNBC Secretariat.¹ Topics covered included: collection of Native geographical names, writing geographical names, funding, and prospects. As a follow-up to this symposium, each year, members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada report on progress made with respect to Resolution 26 “...on the state of Native toponymy and on the implementation of the approved resolutions in each jurisdiction.”

Recommendations on writing indigenous names

Seven recommendations on writing Aboriginal names were accepted as guidelines by the CPCGN at its annual meeting in Halifax on 12 October 1990. This document is available from the GNBC Secretariat.²

¹ GNBC Secretariat, 634 – 615 Booth Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0E9.

² Same as in Footnote 1.

Orthography of indigenous names

In some Aboriginal languages of Canada, syllabics can be used instead of Roman orthography. *Unified Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics*, Amendment 11 of ISO /IEC 10646-1, was accepted 15 July 1998. Software allows keyboarding in syllabics (e.g., Inuktitut), but further development is needed for file transfer and the general use of syllabics in databases.

Between 1992 and 2002, some 27 “hard-to-construct” characters have been used in Aboriginal names (mainly in Athabaskan languages) officially approved in the provinces and territories. As these modified, extended Roman alphabet characters cannot yet be represented in the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base, a list of these characters has been compiled. Each character has been assigned a number and is shown between brace brackets, e.g., {5} represents “K”. For searching purposes, database users enter the letter without the diacritic. As with syllabics, software allows keyboarding of “hard-to-construct” characters, but further development is needed for file transfer and the general use of in databases.³

Collecting indigenous names in the field

The *Guide to the Field Collection of Native Geographical Names* was published in 1992 and is available in separate English and French versions. The *Field Guide* (as it is commonly known) deals with authorization for a field survey, survey organization, undertaking the survey, and processing the survey information. Appendices contain samples of forms and field work maps, the seven recommendations made in 1990, and references. This publication is also available on the Internet in English at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/native_field_guide_e.pdf> and in French at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/native_field_guide_f.pdf>. The *Field Guide* has been found useful in collecting all names, not just indigenous names. It has been used in several parts of Canada as is or with modifications specific to the jurisdiction of use. From time to time, the question of translating the *Field Guide* into indigenous languages arises. Most recently, Quebec has indicated that they might be able to translate it into Cree.

Video

In 1993, the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names produced an 11-minute video titled “*What’s in a Toponym?: the story behind Canada’s geographical names*” in English and “*La toponymie : mémoire des lieux*” in French. Geographical names, naming procedures, and methodologies used in the naming process, bilingualism, multiculturalism, Aboriginal peoples of Canada, and special aspects of provincial and territorial names programmes were included. The video was updated for the centennial of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names in 1997.

³ The Government of the Northwest Territories uses the WinMac Dene Font <<http://www.ssimicro.com/fonts/dene/keystrk.pdf>> software.

Bibliography

In 1993, *Native Canadian geographical names: an annotated bibliography / La toponymie autochtone du Canada : une bibliographie annotée* was published. The third edition of this cumulative publication was published in 1997 as *Aboriginal geographical names of Canada: an annotated bibliography / La toponymie autochtone du Canada : une bibliographie annotée*. This edition, with some 1,500 entries, is available on the Internet at <<http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/nativebibsecure.pdf>> or for sale.

Using the Internet

In 1994, the GNBC Secretariat put the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB) on the Internet. It can be found there at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/search/index_e.php>. Since then users have been able to search this database to find approved names, formerly approved names, and names of undersea features. In addition, educational, textual materials on indigenous names and their origins can be found on several pages in the web site <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/index_e.php> in the sections called “Educational Resources” and “News and Info”.

Language Tables

About 1994, the Geographical Names Board of Canada’s Advisory Committee on Toponymy Research began compilation of the Aboriginal Language Tables to indicate languages used in the different provinces and territories. These tables, intended for internal use by the Geographical Names Board of Canada are Excel files listing jurisdiction, family, language, dialect, and special characters. They are in separate English and French versions. Considered working documents, the Tables still require validation by members of the Aboriginal community.

Naming guidelines

Guidelines for naming or renaming Indian Reserves and geographical features or places on or partially on Indian Reserves were adopted in 2002 by the GNBC. To clarify the role of a First Nation Band Council, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC), the Aboriginal Communication Working Group of the GNBC identified new guidelines to streamline the naming process. It is also important to note that this document does not address any other types of lands where Aboriginal peoples may reside or that they may use.

Fact sheet

In 2002, a fact sheet *Aboriginal Place Names: Charting Our Heritage* was prepared. It is in two forms – English/French or English/Inuktitut. The intent is to inform the Aboriginal communities across Canada that there are processes for having Aboriginal geographical names recognized officially. Copies of this publication can be found in pdf format at: <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/factsheet_e.pdf> in English, at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/factsheet_f.pdf> in French, and at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/factsheet_i.pdf> in Inuktitut.

Canadian Geographical Names Service (CGNS)

The Canadian Geographical Names Service (CGNS) <http://gnss.nrcan.gc.ca/index_e.html> was launched in 2003. It is the latest technology being used to distribute Canada's geographical names information. Non-Roman or modified extended Roman alphabet characters used in Aboriginal geographical names are supported in the Geographical Name Search Service (GNSS) by providing a mapping between supported characters and a substitute character string. By clicking on the Aboriginal codes link found on both search pages, it displays a pop up page. This page allows a user to select the characters they want to use to spell an Aboriginal place name. As the various images are clicked, the substitute character string (e.g., {1}) is transferred to the query text box and used to search the Geographical Name Search Service. For the time being gif images are used to represent the characters in the GNSS, so that a user can spell the word using these characters as required. A decoder was built for the results page to display a name with the modified extended Roman alphabet characters.

II. Activities at the provincial and territorial level

Symposium

In March 1979, Quebec held a workshop on writing indigenous names. Papers from this workshop were published as *Atelier sur l'écriture des noms de lieux amérindiens*.

Papers presented dealt with names in Quebec, Manitoba, and Newfoundland as well as grammatical problems, orthography, alphabets, etc. Some 19 resolutions resulted and are enumerated in French and English. Another publication – *Rapport d'étape concernant l'atelier sur l'écriture des noms de lieux amérindiens 1979 – 1984* on the actions taken with respect to the resolutions of the workshop was produced in 1984.

Databases and web sites

Several, but not all, members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada have their own databases and web sites. Links to the provincial and territorial web sites can be found at <http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/info/sites_e.php>. While most provincial and territorial jurisdictions do not have a specific indigenous component to their web sites, all jurisdictions promote the use of official geographical names whether indigenous or not.

Quebec has the ability to assign codes to the names in their database so that they can identify names of Aboriginal, English, and French origin.

On British Columbia's web site there is an audio component to their page "Nisga'a Names, Nisga'a Lands" at <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/bcnames/g2_nl.htm>. It uses streaming audio and requires a RealMedia Player available for free from <<http://RealNetworks.com>>.

In the Northwest Territories, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre has online exhibits in the section called "Lessons from the Land". The first exhibit posted is called the *Idaà Trail* and is available in three languages – English, Dogrib, and French. In

addition, you can also visit *The Inuvialuit Place Name Virtual Exhibit* at <<http://pwnhc.learnnet.nt.ca/inuvialuit/>>. This, too, is available in three languages – English, French, and Inuvialuktun.

Map

In 1985, the Ontario Geographic Names Board commissioned the production of a *Historical Map of Temagami*. It showed traditional routes of travel, campsites, and geographical names used by the indigenous Anishinawbeg before 1900. The map also included illustrations, an abbreviation key, a pronunciation guide, and a geographical name index.

Names board membership

Some jurisdictions in Canada have a legal requirement to have one or more Aboriginal members on their names board. Other jurisdictions have chosen to have Aboriginal representation. Jurisdictions with Aboriginal members include the Yukon Territory, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec. (Five provinces and one territory have names boards; five provinces and one territory do not have names boards; the third territory is in the process of establishing a names board.)

Names publications

Several jurisdictions have produced publications either entirely devoted to indigenous geographical names or concerning all approved names in the jurisdiction whether indigenous or not.

Alberta has produced *Place Names of Alberta* in four volumes. The books are for sale but have also been digitized. They can be found on the Internet at <http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/loc_hist/lh_srch.asp>.

Manitoba published *Geographical Names of Manitoba* in 2000. Indigenous names in this publication have a translation in the entry. Wherever possible, the language the name comes from is indicated. For example, **Assiniwun Creek** – A Cree name meaning *pebbles*.

Quebec has produced a series of publications on Aboriginal toponymy. A series of publications deals with Aboriginal names for specific groups. Titles include: *La toponymie des Abénaquis*; *La toponymie des Algonquins*; *La toponymie des Attikameks*; *La toponymie des Hurons-Wendats*; and *La toponymie des Naskapis*. A sixth volume - *La toponymie des cris* - is in production. In addition, Quebec produced *La toponymie autochtone au Québec, Bilan et prospective* in 1996. The Secretariat of the then Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical names arranged for its translation into English with the title *Native toponymy in Quebec ... Past, present and future ...* Subjects dealt with included the policy of the Commission de toponymie, current and future issues, and the Canadian and international situation. One of the appendices indicates the progress in surveys for each nation; number of surveys; geographical names surveyed; geographical names processed; and number of names officialized.

III. Activities by other groups and organizations

In addition to the activities of the Geographical Names Board of Canada and its provincial and territorial members, there are groups and individuals collecting indigenous names, producing publications on indigenous names and field collection of these names. Listed below are just a few of these activities, some done with input from the province or territory. More activities may be found in the bibliography mentioned in the first section.

Place names publications

Les noms de lieux montagnais des environs de Mingan by Henri Dorion was published in 1967 while he was a professor at the Université Laval.

The Gazetteer of Inuit Places Names in Nunavik (Quebec, Canada) / Répertoire toponymique inuit du Nunavik (Québec, Canada) was published jointly by Ludger Müller-Wille and the Avataq Cultural Institute in 1987. This gazetteer “includes all Inuit geographical names collected and documented by the Inuit in Nunavik ... – the Inuit regions of Quebec and adjacent islands.” Names in this gazetteer are listed in one section by region and in another section by alphabetical order.

Field work guide

The manual/field guide *Name Your Place: using community-based research methods to document Alberta's place names* was published in 1998 by the Friends of Geographical Names of Alberta Society. This document was based, in part, on the *Guide to the Field Collection of Native Geographical Names*. Input was also provided by the Alberta Geographical Names Program. This manual is intended for those who have taken the training course (see below), as well as for general interest.

Field work

At least two organizations in what is now the territory of Nunavut have conducted field work to collect Inuit names. The Nunavut Research Institute conducted the South Baffin Place Names Project discussed on the Internet at <<http://npc.nunavut.ca/eng/regions/southbaf/archeol.html>>. It was intended to share the knowledge acquired in a talking map. Unfortunately, the map was either never produced or has been removed from the Internet. Another organization in Nunavut, the Inuit Heritage Trust, has conducted place name workshops in Pond Inlet and Taloyoak to collect the indigenous names, information about them, and where the names come from. Eventually, the names will be submitted to the yet-to-be-created names board in Nunavut for adoption and dissemination on maps and other documents.

In Alberta, the Friends of Geographical Names Society of Alberta conducted a *Native Mapping Project*. The report of the project said that it was intended to let readers know “... about Native place names in Alberta and to give a brief account of the history of Native people in the province so that the significance of Native names can be better understood.” The bulk of the report identifies areas of the province occupied by various

indigenous groups and plots the locations of place names and Indian Reserves associated with each group.

The “Name Your Place” project is a joint initiative of the Friends of Geographical Names of Alberta Society and the Alberta Geographical Names Program, intended for use by all Alberta communities, whether indigenous or not. The aims of this project are to:

- *train Alberta communities in the proper collection of geographical name data so that they can initiate and conduct their own projects*
- *promote awareness about the importance of geographical name information*
- *provide ongoing consultation to Alberta communities that wish to undertake projects that focus on collecting geographical name information*

Internet

The Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC), although not a member of the GNBC, has connections to the Yukon Geographical Place Names Board. The Language Centre’s web site is at <<http://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/ynlc/index.html>>. Among its many other educational activities, the YNLC works with First Nations Elders to document place names.

IV. Conclusion

As can be seen from this brief summary, promotion of indigenous geographical names has been undertaken for more than one hundred years in Canada. It is being done at all levels – nationally, provincially and territorially, and by groups and individuals – all in an effort to retain precious cultural, historical, and spatial information.