

**Twenty-third Session
Vienna, 28 March – 4 April 2006**

**Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda:
Reports of the Divisions**

The United States/Canada Division

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Report of the United States/Canada Division

The members of the USA/Canada Division have numerous, similar toponymic problems and issues, and therefore cooperate often and as needed on issues of common interest and concerns. The cooperation and collaboration include many topics and extend to the various Provinces and States of Canada and the United States respectively. Some common categories of cooperation are described in this report, but specific papers regarding specific topics within each country can be found submitted under the appropriate agenda topics of this 23rd Session.

Meetings

Since the 22nd Session of UNGEGN, representatives of the USA/Canada Division have met three times - during the annual meetings of the Council of Geographic Names Authorities and the Geographical Names Board of Canada, which have proved to be ideal sessions for discussions. Several areas of cooperation and issues of mutual interest were discussed. Attending each other's annual meetings has afforded an excellent opportunity for exchange and acquiring differing techniques for problem solving relating to similar issues.

Policies and procedures

Division representatives have had discussions regarding policies and procedures for collecting, processing, and applying indigenous names according to the guidelines most applicable in each respective country. There has been much activity in both countries regarding agreements, use and application of names from indigenous languages, and policy development and enhancement. The divisional representatives continually compare principles, policies, and procedures for standardizing geographical names.

Databases and web sites

There have also been discussions and formal exchange of ideas and documentation regarding names automation, especially regarding electronic data exchange and web-based applications. Each national names authority has authorized and directed the re-engineering and redesign of their respective official, domestic geographical names databases, and there was a considerable amount of information and advice exchanged regarding these projects. There has also been extensive enhancement in data delivery and efficiency of the official web sites, much of which resulted from collaboration and exchange of information.

Since 2004, the Canadian Geographical Names Service (CGNS) has been undergoing further development. Members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) were given access to the development site and allowed to test the new enhancement. The CGNS was developed in partnership with members of the Geographical Names Board of Canada, using an agreed upon national standard for toponymic databases that would allow for the integration of toponymic data into the fundamental layers of the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure (CGDI).

In the United States, the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), the nation's official geographic names repository, was completely redesigned including aspects of data management, the national maintenance program, and the public interface, the latter of which was made more intuitive and faster with direct data links to the most technically current map displays. Also, the principles, policies, and procedures of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names were revised and modernized, and can be found at

<http://geonames.usgs.gov>.

These actions and accomplishments in each country were implemented separately, but utilized the results of collaboration between the two countries.

Publications

Various publications, including *Principles and procedures for geographical naming* and *Generic Terms in Canada's Geographical Names*, of the GNBC require updating. Several Working Groups were created at the 2005 annual meeting to look at what is needed to update these publications. It is hoped that some will be produced before the 2007 Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Similarly, in the USA, the final draft version of the revised *Principles, Policies, & Procedures* was completed, and also a new version of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names website has been made available.

Organization of the names authorities

Since 2004, the GNBC has been taking a serious look at itself and its functions and activities. At its 2004 annual meeting the GNBC dissolved its four existing advisory committees and created two new ones. The new advisory committees have been organized so that they handle many of the functions of the former committees while also looking towards current and future responsibilities. In order to clarify membership of the GNBC, the Chair requested that each GNBC member confirm in writing that they were the GNBC member. In many instances it has not always been possible for the official member to attend the GNBC meetings. In such cases, the Chair requested that the “delegated” person also be identified.

Division members and UNGEGN

There has been collaboration within the Division as well as throughout UNGEGN as a result of positions held by Division members within UNGEGN. These include the Chair of UNGEGN, the Convener of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers, and the Convener of the Working Group on Country Names. Also, Division members serve as UNGEGN liaison with the International Hydrographic Organization and the Pan American Institute of Geography & History.

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