

**Twenty-fifth session
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Reports of the divisions

Report of the Canada-USA Division 2007-2009*

***Prepared by the secretariats of the Geographical Names Board of Canada and the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.**

Areas of Divisional cooperation

Representatives of the United States/Canada Division have met a few times since 2007: at the Conference of the Council on Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) in Oklahoma City (2008); and at the Geographical Names Board of Canada's annual meetings in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (2007), and in the city of Québec, Quebec (2008). These meetings offer the opportunity to exchange knowledge and best practices on issues of common interest such as Aboriginal naming, automation of data bases, and so forth.

US activities

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has been working on web services to delivery the data from both its domestic (Geographic Names Information System – GNIS) and foreign (GEOnet Names Server – GNS) databases. Specifically, the focus has been on providing a Web Feature Service for Gazetteers (WFS-G). The service will use Extendable Markup Language (XML) to deliver data to other systems and applications, as well as provide mechanism for synchronizing and maintaining data between and amongst trusted partners and stewards.

The GNIS ID number attained the status of an American National Standards Institute standard for the identification of domestic geographic features. This standard applies to selected named physical and cultural geographic features, geographic areas, and locational entities, except roads and highways, that are generally recognizable and locatable by name (i.e., have achieved some landmark status) and are of interest to any level of government and to the public for any purpose that would lead to the representation of the feature in printed or electronic maps and/or geographic information systems.

The complete title of the standard is Identifying Attributes for Named Physical and Cultural Geographic Features (Except Roads and Highways) of the United States, Its Territories, Outlying Areas, and Freely Associated Areas, and the Waters of the Same to the Limit of the Twelve-Mile Statutory Zone (ANSI INCITS 446-2008).

As directed by both the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services is offering grants to police departments at all levels of jurisdiction. Part of the applications for these grants specifies including the GNIS ID number in order to track the appropriations.

With the 30 year GNIS Phase II data compilation program nearing completion, the emphasis has shifted towards the collection of domestic microtoponyms. The addition of these administrative features, buildings, and structures will aid in emergency preparedness and response. The initial collection efforts are being done through contracts and grants, with the intention of having local partners and stewards add and maintain the data in the future.

The U.S. Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) will hold its annual conference in Charleston, South Carolina, September 8-12, 2009. COGNA is an independent non-profit organization made up of the official geographic names authorities (State and Federal) in

the United States. The Domestic Names Committee (DNC) of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names is invited to hold its monthly meeting in conjunction with the conference. The conferences offer a unique venue to discuss similarities and differences in the policies and procedures of the authorities comprising COGNA. The 2007 and 2008 conferences were held in Lexington, Kentucky and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, respectively.

The DNC has stated on more than one occasion that it does not wish to become involved in the pronunciation of geographic names. However, the secretariat has provided grants to organizations to collect Waveform Audio Format (wav) files of Native American and Hawaiian place names, as well as the origins and histories of the names, through its parent agency, the U.S. Geological Survey.

The staff of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names Foreign Names Committee has implemented a revised interface to its GEONet Names Server, the publicly-accessible Web interface to the Board's collection of foreign geographic names. The new interface includes both a textual and a graphical query interface to the foreign place-name collection. The GEONet Names Server may be accessed through the Board's Web home page at geonames.usgs.gov.

Pursuant to an international agreement between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the staff of the Board's Foreign Names Committee has been working with the Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office to provide assistance in the establishment of a national geographic names authority within Afghanistan.

Canadian activities

In Canada, geographical information is provided by provincial/territorial naming authorities to the GNBC Secretariat for entry into the national name repository. There are four computer systems sustaining the production side of the publication of geographical names. They are (i) the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (GNDB), (ii) the Geographical Names of Canada Web site, (iii) the Geographical Names Search Service (GNSS), GNApp, Api and cgnsServices, and (iv) the CGNS WFS-WMS data warehouse. There are also developmental computers and backup systems. All four computers were upgraded early in 2005. The CGNS runs on a WFS licence. The search capability presently available on the Geographical Names of Canada Web site will be replaced by the Geographical Name Search Service (GNSS).

In 2008 the data loading (GNApp) software was finally used in production mode. Using GNApp, all members have now access to full content of the CGNS and may load new name records. Options were added to allow output in various formats (XML, WFS, KML). Extensive efforts are being applied to reconcile data between the national data base and the provincial/territorial data bases.

Following on initial conversations with the GNBC members concerning a no-cost distribution of toponymic data, a general consensus was reached by GNBC members who have agreed to the release of the toponymic layer of information in GeoBase (i.e. core fields) at no cost to users by

province/territory rather than only by NTS tile/sheet number. They also agreed that standard digital files provided by Secretariat to external clients would be accessible on a no-cost basis.

Clients requiring smaller data sets are referred to the CGNS Web site, where they can structure queries using various parameters, or make use of the api (application programming interface) to retrieve data. CGNS data are already available without cost, and may be used without restriction, provided that the source is identified and credited.

Queries continue to be received from government, industry, and the public. The majority of queries, about all aspects of GNBC policies and practices, come through the *Geographical Names of Canada Web site*.

The next meeting of the Geographical Names of Canada will be held in Iqaluit, Nunavut on August 6-7, 2009. Aboriginal names will be a key element of the meeting with expected participation from local Aboriginal groups.

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