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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN
THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN
IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report on the Activities of the
United States in the Area of Geographic Names

Submitted by United States of Americas**/

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REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE AREA OF GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

SUMMARY. This paper provides an overview of the work of the United States Board on Geographic names since the 5th UN Conference in 1987. Because of the broad involvement of the Board during the period, the paper requires several pages. Two major activities were the celebration of the Board's 100th anniversary in 1990 and the efforts to keep pace with the rapidly changing names associated with political changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. One result was a program to publish a new bulletin on name changes for broad distribution. While continuing to satisfy its national commitments, the Board also remained active in its relations with individual states in the US and with other countries and international organizations. Another major development is a new program of the Defense Mapping Agency to collaborate with other nations in regard to geographic names. The paper covers all important topics but other US reports will provide greater detail on some subjects.

THE US BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES. Since the last UN conference, the Board met 20 times at quarterly meetings, i.e., every three months. During that time, several new Board members and deputy members were appointed and new officers are elected. The process assures a combination of experienced members and new appointees to the benefit of the entire organization and the agencies it represents. At meetings, standing and advisory committees presented reports on their activities which the Board approved, or, as was required, deferred pending additional information. In accordance with its mandate, the Board at various times asked committees to undertake additional work or perform in other ways. The Board also established new committees. A committee was created to plan the Board's Centennial program and a Publicity Committee was also formed. The Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names and the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features also report to the Board. The Domestic Names Committee meets every month or more often as needed. The Foreign Names Committee and the Advisory Committees meet approximately every three months. A separate paper contains a brochure describing the Board.

BGN SUPPORT

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Headquartered in Virginia near Washington, D.C., the USGS provides technical support to the Domestic Names Committee of the Board. The BGN Executive Secretary for Domestic Names and a research staff of about 12 persons are employees of USGS. A major share of the DNC work is to support production of a wide range of topographic maps covering the United States, its possessions, and territories. USGS publishes national and state gazetteers and maintains a digital names file.

The Defense Mapping Agency (DMA). DMA is headquartered in Virginia near Washington, D. C. and provides technical support to the Board in several ways. It provides a staff of about 32 names experts to

support the BGN mission and the DMA mission of producing topographic maps and aeronautical and hydrographic charts on a world-wide basis (exclusive of the United States). Other DMA employees are the Executive Secretary of the Board (who also is the Executive Secretary for Foreign Names), the secretary of the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names, and the secretary of Advisory Committee on Undersea Features. Other DMA support includes publishing foreign-names gazetteers for the Board and developing the Geographic Names Processing System.

BGN ACTIVITIES SINCE 1987

Centennial Celebration. In September 1990, the US Board on Geographic Names celebrated its 100th anniversary with a three-day event in Washington, D. C. A major element was a 2-day symposium: "The Board--Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" which permitted many speakers to describe how the Board has functioned to meet requirements of users in the federal and local state governments, in the media, in publishing, in professional circles, in academia, and in the international area. A number of posters, publications, and special maps were prepared for an exhibit. Attending the events were some 75 persons representing the above organizations. The chairmen of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use were among speakers. One honored speaker was Dr. Meredith Burrill, BGN Executive Secretary Emeritus. A separate paper contains the program of the symposium.

New Publicity Program. The Centennial Celebration showed the Board needed to communicate with an increasingly large body of users. Further, it was recognized that although BGN generally functions to serve requirements of different audiences, there is a need to publicize the Board as a whole. Accordingly, A Publicity Committee was created to develop programs to publicize the Board as a whole. The first action is a "Public Sale Catalog" which contains a description of all BGN publications and documents as well as prices and instructions for purchasing the items. A separate paper includes a copy of the catalog.

DOMESTIC NAMES COMMITTEE

Introduction. Since 1947, standardization of geographic names in the United States and its possessions and territories has been carried out in the name of the Board by its Domestic Names Committee (DNC). The DNC, which meets monthly, consists of members and deputies representing federal agencies concerned with geographic feature names. The Executive Secretary and staff support for the DNC are provided by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), an agency of the Department of the Interior.

Policy Additions and Amendments Every two years, the DNC holds a meeting to review the effectiveness, responsiveness, and applicability of policies governing the activities of the DNC. If necessary, DNC policies are amended to accommodate changes in the requirements of users of geographic feature names. Several actions resulted since 1987.

* The Scientific Reference Subcommittee' prepared a report which was approved by the full Board at its third quarterly meeting of 1986 and signed by the Secretary of the Interior on December 22, 1986. The policy statement follows.

"The U.S. Board on Geographic Names will consider name proposals for unnamed features in areas where needed to expedite scientific investigations. Scientists may submit name proposals for the minimum number of geographic entities needed for their studies and descriptions of the natural resources in areas under investigation. Each proposal must contain an adequate justification for the selection of the particular entity and of the appropriateness of the proposed name. Proposals honoring persons should be avoided."

* At its April 1988 meeting the DNC approved the final draft of a letter that was sent to State cooperators, names authorities, and Federal agencies. The letter informed them that after a name has been deferred for a period of one year, the case will be reviewed by the DNC for possible action.

* The Subcommittee on Commemorative Names was created in 1990 to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Board's Commemorative Naming Policy. The subcommittee focused on two issues: the one-year waiting period upon death of a proposed honoree, and the text of the policy. It was decided to retain the one-year waiting period, and to make the text more restrictive. An information pamphlet is being prepared for distribution to the public.

* U.S. maritime boundaries have traditionally delimited the extent of the DNC's purview in rendering decisions. The U.S. currently recognizes a twelve mile limit, but the DNC is rendering decisions for features only within the prior three mile limit. The area between the three and twelve mile limits is currently under the purview of the Advisory Committee on Underseas Features (ACUF). Issues being discussed include the application of names within the legal limit and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

* On June 11, 1992 a subcommittee was formed to determine which feature types fall within the Board's purview.

Issues Resolved or Under Discussion. Monthly minutes of the DNC meetings reflect discussions not only of specific geographic-feature name cases before the committee, but also of issues concerning the work of the committee.

* The DNC voted in February 1987 to recommend to the Board that it rescind the existing Pronunciation Key published in the Sixth Report of the Board on Geographic Names. On August 1987 the DNC voted that a pronunciation guide was not needed and that none would be adopted at that time.

* A new proposal form was submitted to the DNC at its April 1989 meeting and was adopted for use.

* On October 1989, the DNC voted that the Feature Class Definitions of the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) in the GNIS Data User's Guide would be used to classify features for DNC purposes.

* At the request of the U. S. Forest Service, the DNC voted to include, when applicable, the name of the National Forest in which a feature is located in the descriptions of features published in committee Decision Lists.

* In September 1990 the DNC noted it was unclear to personnel of the USGS mapping center who was responsible for dealing with name controversies within a National Forest. Representatives of the Forest Service and National Park Service recommended the appropriate person at USGS contact the proper office of the Forest Service or the Park Service to ascertain who to contact when dealing with name controversies.

* The US Geological Survey and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) are preparing an agreement whereby TVA will be responsible for revising approximately 800 topographic maps at 1:24,000 which cover their region. DNC staff has initiated actions to increase TVA's awareness of the Board and its policies.

* Two issues regarding the naming of features in California have surfaced. The Names Authority of the state of California has a policy of not approving names for "insignificant" features, but the DNC has no such restrictions and in fact has no policy about a feature's size. Also, the owner of a water tank or reservoir in California can change its name by notifying the California Department of Water Resources in writing. This action conflicts with DNC policy. The committee has offered to collaborate with the California Names Authority to develop an information sheet describing the Board's policies and procedures for distribution to appropriate State Agencies.

Native American Names. The geographic names of native peoples are an important and integral part of the cultural heritage of the United States. The DNC strives to maintain sensitivity to the wishes of native peoples in the use and application of geographic feature names.

* During the first week in June, 1987, the Executive Secretary for Domestic Activities met with officials of the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, the Hopi Tribe in Kykotsmovi, and the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Whiteriver, all in Arizona. The meetings were organized to ascertain the willingness of the Native American groups to participate in a program to collect geographic names in their own script, along with their meanings, and to then transcribe the names into a form acceptable for publication on maps used by the general public. The three tribal groups have since been working with the BGN and the U. S. Geological

Survey to collect names for features within Native American Reservations. The leaflet titled Field Investigation of Native American Placenames was published by the U.S. Forest Service on behalf of the BGN and its Special Committee on Native American Placenames.

* USGS topographic maps of Guam are scheduled for revision, and local residents have expressed an interest in having the original Native names reflected on the revised maps. The responsible USGS Mapping Center will submit these names to the DNC for consideration. Some names may contain diacritical marks.

GNIS Data Management The Board has given sanction to the USGS Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) as the official depository of information about names of domestic geographic features. The DNC works closely with USGS in determining guidelines and policies governing the management of the GNIS.

* The USGS Branch of Geographic Names assumed responsibility of the publication, Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) 55, file from the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The file contains unique five digit codes for places, counties, county subdivisions and Census areas within the United States.

* Training for selected Forest Service employees in the use and maintenance of GNIS was conducted during April and May of 1991 in Denver, Colorado.

* GNIS data are now available on compact disk (CD-ROM). The disk has been distributed to the USGS Earth Science Information Center offices around the nation and to the USGS Library. It is not being sold to the public at this time, but the possibility of obtaining copies for interested DNC Board members is being investigated.

Decisions from August 1987 through August 1992

Month/year	Number of decisions
August 1987 through December 1987	236
1988	535
1989	344
1990	363
1991	404
January 1992 through August 1992	133

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Notable Meetings

* A session dealing with the use of geographic names in GIS applications was held at the annual Association of American Geographers meeting in San Diego, California on April 20, 1992.

* Members of the DNC have attended the annual meetings of the Western States Geographic Names Council at the invitation of the Council. The

conference is hosted on a rotating basis by one of the member States, and the DNC holds its monthly meeting during the Conference. The 1990 Conference was held in Washington D.C. in conjunction with the Board's Centennial celebration. The annual meetings continue to be a much needed forum for the interchange of ideas and philosophies among the various State names authorities and the federal Board regarding the geographic naming process.

Major Publications

A booklet entitled Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names was published in 1987. A revised edition was published in 1989.

At its March 1988 meeting the DNC voted to include the BGN alphabetizing rules as an appendix to Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names.

The third edition of the directory Geographical Names Authorities and Other Organizations: United States, Canada, and Mexico was published in 1989. It provides a list of authorities and organizations in North America concerned with geographic names.

The National Science Foundation, in cooperation with the U. S. Geological Survey and the Defense Mapping Agency, published an interim Gazetteer of the Antarctic in 1989.

At its February 1990 annual Policy Review Meeting, the DNC voted to publish the Decision List annually instead of quarterly beginning with calendar year 1990.

At its July 1990 meeting the DNC voted to move its minutes to be housed with other BGN material at the National Archives.

A very useful compilation and indexing of all significant DNC/BGN actions was compiled by Mr. Donald J. Orth, former Executive Secretary for Domestic Activity. A draft copy is now in review, and it will soon be published and made available to State names authorities.

The following volumes of USGS Professional Paper 1200, The National Gazetteer, were published between 1987 and 1992.

Indiana	1988	(23,000 names)
South Dakota	1989	(24,000 names)
Concise	1990	(44,000 names)
North Dakota	1990	(8,500)

FOREIGN NAMES COMMITTEE

Introduction. With the many changes affecting countries and names in the past 5 years, the Foreign Names Committee has been heavily involved with updating its files of some 5 million names, revising gazetteers, and providing names information for many customers. In addition to regular meetings approximately every three months, members and staff also met periodically to discuss new names. The Executive Secretary of the Board was particularly involved with BGN programs and related DMA map and charts production actions.

International Collaboration. It remains an important task for the Board to develop collaboration with new countries to exchange names information. In countries using non-roman scripts, it will be particularly important to obtain names sources written in the local writing systems.

In addition to Board efforts to exchange names information with other countries, the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) has a new program to offer assistance to counterpart organizations in other countries to create or strengthen local actions to standardize geographic names. As these DMA programs mature, BGN will enhance its work for treating names on a world-wide basis. The new DMA programs are part of US-other country cartographic activities and include these countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia., Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, South Korea, Laos, Liberia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Additional countries are being added to this list

Publications on Foreign Names. The production and revision of gazetteers remain important elements of Board's mission. Reflecting all these factors, DMA supported the revision and publication of 32 gazetteers since 1987. A separate paper provides more information about gazetteers.

An important aspect of BGN work is to revise and update gazetteers of countries and regions afflicted with illegal drug traffic. The gazetteers provide important information for counter-narcotic programs. Gazetteers covering all or part of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Paraguay were published for this purpose.

A major new BGN publication is the Foreign Names Information Bulletin. With world events occurring rapidly, the Board recognized it should provide information about new names to users as quickly as possible. The first, FNIB was issued on February 2, 1992. It included new names of 22 countries (including names of new countries resulting from the demise of the Soviet Union and the unification of Germany) and of 53 significant names in those and other countries recorded since January 1991. A second edition issued on June 1, 1992 contained new names of 6 countries and 17 places. This popular publication has been circulated to a list of about 100 federal and other organizations. Future bulletins will appear every 3 months or as needed. A separate paper includes copies of the bulletins.

Digital Programs. Programs to digitize names have been underway at DMA for a long period of time. The DMA Geographic Names Processing System is now reaching completion and will enable BGN names experts at DMA to work with greater efficiency. While basic toponymic research will still rely on human factors, the digitization of the results of research will bring many benefits. For maps, incidentally, the

cartographer can now ask the system to produce all new names within a designated area for map or chart update.

A prototype for a new digital gazetteer is nearing completion. It will present in CD ROM the information as presented in BGN country gazetteers. A major development is its ability to show names with a full range of diacritics and special markings to reflect BGN romanization systems. While the discs will cover individual countries, software is planned to permit the extraction of data from two or more countries. In this regard, a special digital gazetteer is being prepared for the Caribbean Sea with names from specified countries, including the southern portion of US states along the Caribbean Sea. Printouts of selected names is possible for the digital gazetteers.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN). Dating from 1941, ACAN has continued with its program to adopt names for features in Antarctica and to publish gazetteers. It works with other nations to help assure consistency of naming. Since the 1987 UN conference, BGN has published a gazetteer of Antarctic name gazetteers with 3000 entries and associated locational data. At present, ACAN is preparing to publish a gazetteer similar to one issued in 1980 that has text about discovery and naming of features. Mark Rockmore of DMA serves as secretary of ACAN. A separate paper discusses other aspects of ACAN work.

Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) Although BGN had worked with names of undersea features for many years, ACUF was created in 1964 to deal with names more systematically. Some of its guidelines were based on practices of the International Hydrographic Organization, but ACUF developed additional principles, policies, and procedures. In 1990, it published a fourth edition of the Gazetteer of Undersea Features with some 6700 names. Since then, it has approved an additional 308 names.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Canada. The BGN continued to work with its colleagues in Canada in various ways. One important activity is the US/Canada Boundary Names Committee. The goal was to examine different names for features common to both countries and to determine whether a single name could be adopted. Progress was made, but it was recognized that such factors as local cultural traditions required some names to be retained. As the US/Canada Division of the UNGEGN, both countries exchanged ideas and information about their respective programs. US representatives attended some annual CPCGN sessions. In addition, the BGN Executive Secretary had useful meetings with Mr. Dorion, former Chairman of the CPCGN, on issues concerning the US and Canada as well as the UN.

United Kingdom. Following a tradition of over 60 years, the BGN and its counterpart, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN), worked closely on many issues. The