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English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by divisions of the Group of Experts on
Geographical Names on the situation in their
divisions and on the progress made in the
standardization of geographical names since
the Seventh Conference**

Report of the United States/Canada Division

Submitted by United States of America and Canada**

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Since the Seventh Conference of the United Nations on the Standardization of Geographical Names in January 1998, representatives of the USA/Canada Division have met nine times informally in association with other geographical name activities including the annual meetings of the Council of Geographic Names Authorities and the Geographical Names Board of Canada (formerly the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, which changed its name by Order-in-Council, 2 March 2000), which have proved to be ideal sessions for discussions. Several areas of cooperation and issues of mutual interest may be mentioned. Naming authorities in the United States and Canada (national and state/provincial) have continued to cooperate closely by exchanging documentation, and making recommendations in accordance with the bilateral agreement signed between the two national names authorities in 1988 regarding transboundary names. The terms of cooperation in the Transboundary Agreement continue to be especially useful regarding joint efforts between Canada and the United States for bathymetric mapping projects in the Great Lakes of North America. Attending each other's annual meetings has afforded an extraordinary opportunity for exchange and acquiring differing techniques for problem solving relating to similar issues. The Division representatives have also agreed on the basic tenet that standardized geographical names are essential to development and implementation of a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), and have had appropriate related discussions especially in regard to development of the toponymic mapping framework layer.

Division representatives have had numerous 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 with special regard to established dialogue among all interested parties. Both countries have discussed appropriate terminology to refer to their country's earliest inhabitants.

There was considerable collaboration within the Division relating to the establishment of a working group of the Canadian Geographical Names Board to accept and process proposals for names in Antarctic originating from Canadian nationals. The experience of the United States Board in processing name proposals for features in Antarctica was of considerable assistance in the Canadian endeavour.

The divisional representatives continually compare principles, policies, and procedures for standardizing geographical names. In March 2001, the Geographical Names Board of Canada published a revised edition of its *Principles and Procedures for geographical naming*, and the United States Board is in the process of evaluating certain policies and aspects of others, which will necessitate a newly published version of its *Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names*.

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 websites, much of which resulted from collaboration and exchange of information.

Representatives from each Member State of the Division participated in a symposium addressing issues of digital gazetteer development held in Washington, D.C., USA, in October 1999. Members of the Division also served as facilitators for the session that discussed governmental standards for digital gazetteers. The attendees were from the private sector, State government, the Federal Government of the United States, and representatives from six other nations including Canada. The workshop had two goals: one being to develop an understanding of indirect spatial referencing by use of geographical names; and the second was to identify

research and policy issues related to developing an exchange of digital gazetteer information. Government gazetteer producers and geographical naming authorities stressed the use of official names, and the members of the Division collaborated on this effort in particular.

The Division was represented at the second session of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group in March 2000 in Rome, at the symposium “GEONAMES 2000” in March 2000 in Frankfurt, and in April 2001 at the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Data Bases and Gazetteers in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Each occasion afforded opportunities for divisional exchange regarding various specific and general aspects of applied toponymy among its members and with representative from other divisions.
