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Reports by divisions of United Nations 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 Eighth Conference

Report of the United States / Canada Division, 2002 - 2007

Submitted by United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, United States / Canada Division **

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**REPORT OF THE UNITED STATES / CANADA DIVISION,
2002 - 2007**

Areas of Divisional cooperation since 2002

Since the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2002, representatives of the United States / Canada Division have generally met two to three times a year at geographical names meetings of each country - the United States Board of Geographic Names (USBGN), and the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC). Representatives from each country also participated in the annual meetings of the American Names Society (ANS), the Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA), and the Canadian Society for the Study of Names (CSSN) on a less formal basis.

Canada and the United States were represented at the Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers (2007) Working Group meeting in Madrid. Both countries were represented at the 22nd and 23rd Sessions of UNGEGN.

Both countries continue to apply the principles and procedures set out in Resolution V/22 (Fifth Conference) addressing Aboriginal/indigenous names in the way most applicable to each country. There has been much activity in both countries regarding agreements, use and application for Aboriginal/indigenous languages, and policy development and enhancement. Discussions about policies and procedures for collecting, processing, and applying Aboriginal/indigenous names according to the guidelines applicable to each country have been held by divisional representatives.

The combination of digital geographical names databases and the Web has made correct geographical names more accessible to the user community in both countries. In both countries, approximately 90% of name inquiries come through the respective Web sites. Both national names authorities still manage their digital systems with ORACLE RDBMS software and make their data available to their clients through the WWW or through the acquisition of digital files. During the re-engineering and redesign of their respective official geographical names databases, a considerable amount of information and advice was exchanged, particularly in the areas of electronic data exchange and web-based applications.

In Canada, the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB) continues to be operational, but as has been reported at UNGEGN, it will be replaced by the Canadian Geographical Names Service (CGNS). 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>).

Members of the Division met with a representative from Google Earth during COGNA 2006 to discuss the importance of national standardization of toponymy, as well as the role of UNGEGN.

Both countries submitted lists of major city names and geographic coordinates to the UNGEGN secretariat for inclusion in its database on country and major city names. Expertise and experience were exchanged within the Division on techniques used to digitally delineate and store the extents of physical features which Canada has completed at various scales used by the Atlas of Canada and the United States is contemplating undertaking in the future.

By attending each other's annual meetings, each naming authority has been able to benefit from the other's experiences in order to evolve their approaches to making traditional geographical names official.

There continues to be harmonious cooperation between both countries at the state/provincial/national level to address issues concerning common boundary features.

Division members and UNGEGN

Since the Eighth UN Conference in 2002, Ms. Helen Kerfoot, as Chair of UNGEGN, has participated in a number of meetings of UNGEGN Working Groups (Exonyms (2003, 2007); Evaluation and Implementation (2003, 2005, 2007); Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers (2007)) and Divisions (East Central and South-East Europe (2003); Asia South-East and Pacific South-West (2003, 2005); Dutch- and German-speaking Division (2005); Norden Division (2005); Arabic Division (2007)). She has presented material relative to current UNGEGN issues and geographical names standardization at various venues, including the International Geographical Congress (Glasgow, 2004) and the International Congress on Minority Group and Indigenous Names (Netherlands, 2005). Ms. Kerfoot has been an instructor at UNGEGN training courses in Mozambique (2004, 2006), Australia (2004), Austria (2006), and Tunisia (2007). In 2004 and 2006, she chaired the 22nd and 23rd Sessions of UNGEGN.

Not only has there been collaboration within the Division but also throughout UNGEGN as a result of positions held by Division members within UNGEGN. These positions include: the Chair of UNGEGN; the Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers; and the Convener of the Working Group on Country Names. Individual division members also participate in several of the UNGEGN working groups. Also, Division members serve as UNGEGN liaisons with the International Hydrographic Organization and the Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH).

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