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**Item 4 of the provisional agenda**

**Reports of the divisions**

**Report of the Canada-USA Division 2009-2011\***

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\*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 2009: at the Conference of the Council on Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) in Charleston (South Carolina) (2009); and at the Geographical Names Board of Canada's annual meetings in Iqaluit, Nunavut (2009) and Moncton, New Brunswick (2010). These meetings offered the opportunity to exchange knowledge and best practices on issues of common interest such as Aboriginal naming, automation of data bases, and so forth.

More specifically, in the spirit of the *Document of Understanding Concerning the Treatment of Names of Transboundary Features between Canada and the United States* (1989), both countries national, federal, provincial and state naming authorities cooperated in all aspects of the naming process for the approval of *Salish Sea*, a new collective name for a Canada-US transboundary feature including the waters of the Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound, and Juan de Fuca Strait (Canada)/Strait of Juan de Fuca (USA). This inland sea is an ecologically unique entity which supports valuable resources that are used by over 7 million people living on and close to its shorelines. The joint process included extensive consultations with groups of interest on both sides of the border. Official recognition of the name *Salish Sea* acknowledged the local contribution of Aboriginal peoples and the unique ecological character of this body of water spanning the international boundary between Canada and the United States.

Another issue of common interest is the increasing dissemination of unofficial and variant names through Internet sites, Web mapping applications, and online tools such as Google Maps and similar applications. This is of concern to naming authorities because it can create confusion among users of names, such as map makers, GPS and GIS users, and Web developers using geospatial data. For naming authorities, dissemination of official names is a priority, and it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that names which represent broad local usage, and respect principles and procedures for geographical naming, are clearly identified and used as widely as possible.

## **US Activities**

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has been working on web services to deliver 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.

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 continued to offer grants in 2010 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 Honolulu, Hawaii, October 25-29, 2011. 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 2009 and 2010 conferences were held in Charleston, South Carolina and Springfield, Missouri, respectively.

The DNC has formed a Special Committee on Native American Names and Tribal Consultation to make examine existing policies and procedures and make recommendations back to the DNC. The Special Committee has met several times over the past year and hopes to submit its report later this year.

Research material contained in domestic proposal case files are in the process of being scanned. When completed there will be link from the GNIS record for the feature, to the scanned documents which will be viewable on-line. This has the potential to be a valuable resource for toponymists, historians, and geographers.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names Foreign Names Committee continues to maintain and improve its GEOnet Names Server (GNS), the publicly-accessible Web interface to the Board's database of foreign geographic names. The GNS may be used for simple queries as well as file downloads in multiple formats, to include shapefiles and .kmz files. The GNS also provides Web Map Service (WMS) and Web Feature Service (WFS). The GNS may be accessed through the Board's Web home page at [geonames.usgs.gov](http://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 Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat for entry into the national name repository, the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB). The CGNDB can be accessed through the Geographical Names of Canada Web site at [www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca](http://www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca). Both the CGNDB and the Web site use the Web Feature Service (WFS) technology. Queryable Web Mapping Service (WMS) is also available to obtain quick access to current names for GIS users.

Since April 2010, users have the ability to download Canadian geographical names by province or territory, by 1:250,000 or 1:50,000 NTS map sheet tiles or by geographical regions, **without cost** on the GeoBase portal [www.geobase.ca](http://www.geobase.ca). Geographical Names datafiles are available in GML (Geography Markup Language), ESRI Shapefile and KML (Keyhole Markup Language) formats as well as Text files.

Clients requiring smaller data sets are referred to the Geographical Names of Canada Web site at [www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca](http://www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca), where they can structure queries using various parameters, or make use of the api (application programming interface) to retrieve data. Users requiring Web services such as WFS, WMS and API are referred to the Web Services section of the same Web site, provided that the source is identified and credited.

The latest version of the WFS, WMS, API, Web site and CGNDB to be made public in mid-2011 use the UTF-8 encoding of characters, which allows the storage and display of Aboriginal names that contain special or syllabic characters.

GNBC members and the Canadian Council on Geomatics (CCOG) have been working together to develop the concept of a national repository for digital delineations of named features in Canada. Preliminary documentation has been prepared providing the “Rationale”, the “Rules of Engagement” and a proposed “Delineation Data Model”. A proposed development plan is underway.

The CGNDB and CCOG have agreed to use a Unique Universal Identifier (UUID), also known as a Global Unique Identifier (GUID), to uniquely identify geographic features. Referred to as the Feature ID or Name ID in Canada, the Feature ID is maintained in databases of many toponymic and mapping agencies, allowing to link the names with their various geographic representations.

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 [www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca](http://www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca). Toponymy-related issues attracted significant attention from Canadian media over that period, particularly those related to the approval of *Salish Sea* (mentioned above) and the name change of Queen Charlotte Islands to *Haida Gwaii*, on Canada’s west coast.

The publication *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming* is being reprinted, with some corrections, and the addition of guidelines developed by the GNBC since 2001; the publication will also be available for download on the Geographical Names of Canada Web site [www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca](http://www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca). A fact sheet entitled *Geographical Naming in Canada* was also prepared by the GNBC Secretariat as a quick reference to general naming procedures in Canada. It will also be available shortly on the Web site.

The next meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada will be held in Dawson, Yukon, 29 August - 2 September 2011. Aboriginal names will be a key element of the meeting with expected participation from local Aboriginal groups.

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