

Language advisors

According to the Norwegian Place-Name Act

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The purpose of the Act

- The purpose of the Norwegian Olace-Name Act is to safeguard place-names as cultural monuments, to determine a spelling which is practical and useable and to promote knowledge and active use of the names.
- The Act shall secure the consideration of Saami and Kvenish place-names in accordance with national law and international treaties and conventions.

Application

- The Place-Name Act applies where any state, county or municipal body shall determine place-names or the spelling thereof, or use them in the performance of its duties. The Act also applies to the use of place-names in companies that are fully publicly owned and in textbooks that are to be used in the schools. The Ministry may in particular cases give provisions that the Act applies when companies that are not fully publicly owned are using place-names.

Authorization bodies

- The Mapping Authority (including the Norwegian Hydrographic Service) is responsible for and authorizes most place-names, for instance settlement names, fieldnames, and names of natural features at land and sea.
- The municipalities authorize street names and names of other municipal topographic objects.
- The county authorizes names of topographic objects on the county level
- The names of parishes, state parks, oil fields etc. are authorized by the ministry concerned.

The point of departure of the spelling

- The point of departure of the spelling shall be the inherited local spoken form of the name. The spelling shall follow current orthographic principles for Norwegian and Saami. For Kvenish place-names the spelling shall follow current orthographic principles in Finnish. Finnish place-names in Eastern Norway may be adjusted to orthographic principles of Norwegian.

Place-name consultants

- Place-name consultants for Norwegian and Finnish place-names are appointed by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The consultants for Saami place-names are appointed by the Saami Assembly.
- The place-name consultants provide guidance and advice on the spelling of place-names.

Central Place-Name Register

- The Mapping Authority is responsible for a Central Place-Name register (Sentralt stadnamnregister, SSR). Notice of all written forms that have been finally determined shall be given to the register of place-names by the body that has made the decision. The information in the register is public.

Authorization procedures

- When one or several place-names need to be authorized by an authority (most often by the Mapping Authority or by a local authority) following steps must be taken:
 - 1) The authorizing body carries out hearings within the parties concerned. If the Mapping Authority is the authorizing body it seeks municipal assistance for carrying out local hearings.
 - 2) The regional place-name consultancy checks the name material from a linguistic point of view, including the local pronunciation, and recommends a spelling.
 - 3) The authorizing body decides the spelling (most often according to the consultancy's recommendation).
 - 4) Implementation of the authorized name.
 - 5) Filing the name in the national place-name register (SSR).
 - 6) Applying the authorized name in all official contexts

How to decide the spelling

- Local pronunciation
- Accepted ortographic principles
- versus:
- Traditional (older) written forms
- Dialectal forms
- Interest of the owner of properties

Examples

- Voll – Vold – Wold - Waal
- Old Norse ll > ll (*voll* ‘meadow’, not *vold*)
- Old Norse a > o through Umlaut
- (*voll*, not *vaal* or *waal*)
- Norwegian letters: *voll*, not *woll*

Mapping Authority's decision

- Mapping Authority's decision *Voll* according to the Act's regulations.
- However: Traditional (older) written forms are *Vold*, *Wold*, *Waal* and as these spellings often are used as surnames and as names of private businesses, local people prefer to keep such antiquated spellings.

Some problems

- Political aspects:
- Local point of view: “We know best”
- “Place-name experts sitting at their desks far away from the local community don’t know”
- “We are used to this spelling”
- “Our ancestors used to write “Wold””
- Recommended spelling: Voll (according to Norwegian spelling rule) = ‘meadow’

Surnames and place-names

- A main problem:
- A majority of the Norwegian surnames reflect farm names, written in an older and often inconsistent way, and as these “private” spellings are used locally they compete with the official spellings. Local politicians may often support such spellings.

To conclude:

- The intention of the place-name act was good. However, society develops and a new generation of politicians are increasingly listening to what is up for the time being, less to the longstanding standardization program. Still, a professional, well-trained place-name consultancy plays an important part in preserving Norwegian place-names in an consistent and linguistically correct way.