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Geographical Names
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Toponymic Terminology**

Generic terms in the Canadian Geographical Names Database

Submitted by Canada **

Summary:

A primary objective of the 2020–2025 strategic plan for the Geographical Names Board of Canada is to improve the content and the management of the Canadian Geographical Names Database.

Generic terminology goes hand in hand with geographical naming. It is essential for the organization and classification of geographical names. The Board's secretariat and the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada, are working together to conduct a full examination of all the generic terms representing geographical features in the Database, including their definitions, organization and current relevance. This is no small feat, given that there are more than 1,400 generic terms in the Database.

The Board will review and draft:

- The generic code classification, concise code classification, category and subcategory and their organization.
- Plural forms of the generic terms (e.g., Lake vs. Lakes).

The Translation Bureau, in collaboration with the Board's secretariat, will:

- Review terminology used in the generic definitions.
- Organize the generic terms on the basis of a single-concept approach to meet International Organization for Standardization terminology standards.
- Examine the feasibility of having a fully bilingual generic code list.

The Board's secretariat will examine the impact on Natural Resources Canada services, naming jurisdictions and the general public

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Background

The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) is the national coordinating body responsible for standards and policies for geographical naming in Canada. The Board is established under a federal Order in Council, and is composed of members from federal, provincial and territorial government departments and agencies, each with specific responsibilities for their respective jurisdictions and mandates. Working together as a multi-jurisdictional national body, GNBC members ensure that geographical names are consistently managed in Canada.

The activities and priorities of the GNBC are guided by a five-year strategic plan. One of the primary objectives of the 2020-2025 strategic plan is to Improve Database Content and Management.

The GNBC is supported by a Secretariat provided by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), a department of the Government of Canada. NRCan provides the infrastructure and support of the Canadian Geographical Names Database (CGNDB). The CGNDB contains official place names from each Canadian province and territory. The GNBC Secretariat consolidates the geographical names data and disseminates it to the public in a number of open formats for downloading or viewing.

The Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada, is a federal member of the GNBC and is responsible for providing terminology advice in both English and French associated with toponymy and the classification of the geographical feature types (or generic terminology) used in the CGNDB. The Translation Bureau is also responsible for the *Glossary of Generic Terms in Canada's Geographical Names*, also known as the Terminology Bulletin 176 (or TB-176), whose original edition was published in 1987 and was updated in 2011. As the first authoritative publication on generics in use in Canada, TB-176 has fulfilled an important function of the GNBC by furthering coordination and consistency in geographical naming throughout the country, and promoting a better understanding of the named landscape and cultural heritage of Canada. Produced jointly by the Translation Bureau and the GNBC, the Glossary is a collection of official generic terms used in Canada for natural entities (for example, lake, mountain, island, cape, etc.), alpine and glacial landforms, undersea features near the Canadian shoreline, as well as entities, which although human-made, are now perceived to be essentially natural (for example, reservoir, canal, etc.). Most geographical names contain a specific (e.g. "Kelligrews" in "Kelligrews Point") as well as a generic (e.g. "glacier" in "Tiedemann Glacier"). The generic identifies the type of feature being named.

Currently, there are 1248 feature types in the CGNDB. The majority of the feature types in the CGNDB have separate English and French codes and definitions. A large number of feature types have a plural form, meaning that for the Feature Type 'Lake', there would be four different feature codes: lake, lac, lakes and lacs.

The feature types are then grouped by a Concise Term, which originated in the publication of gazetteers. It is a means of simplifying the feature type so that it is more consumable for data dissemination.

For example, the structure of the feature types in the CGNDB is as follows:

Geographical Name	Feature Code	Feature Type	Definition	Observation	Concise Term	Concise Definition
The Pond that Feeds the Brook	953	Pond (1)	Inland body of standing water, usually smaller than a lake.	Widely used in Newfoundland and Labrador, “pond” is applied to lakes of all sizes.	LAKE	Inland body of standing water or expansion of a river, or body of water separated from a lake, river, or sea by a narrow land barrier.

In the example above, the Concise LAKE contains the following feature types: lake, pond, reservoir, lagoon, barasway, flowage, loch, mal bay, lac, lagune, réservoir.

Challenges

As mentioned in the previous section, there are over 1200 feature types stored in the CGNDB. This makes going through a picklist rather tedious. There are many feature types in the CGNDB that are synonyms of each other – meaning they have the exact same definition.

There is also a deviation between some of the definitions from TB 176 and the definitions contained in the CGNDB. This deviation appears to have occurred in the early 2000s when the CGNDB was first available as open data and work was expedited to ensure the feature types were available in both of the official languages of Canadian: English and French.

Objectives

The objective of this project is to conduct a full examination of all the generic codes in the CGNDB, including their definitions, organization, and current relevance. Additionally, the last comprehensive CGNDB user manual was created in 2000 and needs to be updated to reflect the changes that will be implemented in the near future. This objective is closely aligned with another objective of the GNBC Strategic Plan, which is the incorporation of Indigenous cultural generics into the CGNDB, and needs to consider the related goals of establishing Indigenous cultural generics.

Another objective is to synthesize the data contained in TB 176 with the definitions in the CGNDB. This will ensure that CGNDB data is standardized and in line with the expert advice of the Translation Bureau terminologists.

The final objective for the Translation Bureau is for the feature types to meet the single-concept approach for ISO terminology standards.

Methodology

The feature types will be re-organized based on a single-concept approach to meet ISO terminology standards. According to these standards, a record in a database describes a single concept (i.e. one

concept per record) and all data relating to a given concept is represented on one record (i.e. one record per concept). When two or more different concepts are represented by the same designation (in the same language), this designation is considered a homograph. Such concepts are documented on separate records. When two or more features designate the same concept, they should appear on the same record. The Translation Bureau is analyzing the CGNDB data and making suggestions to merge records that fundamentally refer to the same concept.

For example, the Translation Bureau will suggest merging a few entries that designate the same concept in the FALL concise grouping of generic terms:

Generic Term	Feature Code	Feature English term	English definition	Feature French term	French definition
fall	734	fall	Perpendicular or steep descent of water.	chute	Rupture de pente perpendiculaire ou brusque d'où tombe une masse d'eau.
chute	736	waterfall	Mass of water falling abruptly, at a break in the descent of a watercourse.	chute	Masse d'eau tombant brusquement à l'emplacement d'une rupture de pente.
waterfall	768	waterfall	Perpendicular or steep descent of water; variant of Fall.	chute	Rupture de pente perpendiculaire ou brusque d'où tombe une masse d'eau; variante de 'Fall'.

In the case of geographical variants, geographic label parameters will be proposed to define the region where a feature is used. In the example below, the features *bight* and *bite* belong to the BAY concise grouping of generic terms. The Translation Bureau will suggest merging both entries since they refer to the same concept and a geographical parameter will be proposed to identify the feature *bite* that is mainly used in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Generic Term	Feature Code	Feature English term	English definition	Feature French term	French definition
bight	1412	bight	Water area in a broad indentation of the shoreline.	baie	Étendue d'eau occupant une large échancrure du littoral.
bite	1440	bite	Water area in a broad indentation of the shoreline; variant of Bight.	baie	Étendue d'eau occupant une large échancrure du littoral; variante de 'Bight'.

Based on the first delivery of the BAY Concise from the Translation Bureau, the GNBC is currently reviewing the feature type classification, concise classification and data model, to examine the ways in which the CGNDB will be able to house and implement the suggested changes made by the Translation Bureau.

TB 176 does not include separate entries for the plural form of a feature, whereas the CGNDB does. The GNBC is also examining the implications of removing the plural form of the feature types from the list and its impacts on national base maps and on data dissemination.

Conclusion

It is estimated that this project will take two years to complete. Natural Resources Canada and the Translation Bureau are very excited about this work as it will ensure the terminology used in Canada's feature types is standardized and synthesized. It will make knowledge transfer between toponymists easier and ensure there is less error in the classification of Canada's geographical names.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the work to review the feature type definitions and structure;
- (b) Comment and provide input on similar work being carried out in other countries and effective or innovative tools being used.