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Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Culture, heritage and language recognition: geographical
names as culture, heritage and identity**

Mapping changes to geographical names over time in Canada

Summary**

Since 1897, the Geographical Names Board of Canada has worked to establish standards and practices for the naming of Canadian places and features. Naming authorities of the Board are responsible for maintaining over 350,000 official place names across Canada. The names are used on official government maps and documents and by various other users in a range of applications. The process for adopting and changing official geographical names is coordinated by federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities, depending on where the place or geographical feature is located.

Changes to official geographical names recognized by the Board are made periodically for various reasons. A decision to change the official name of a place, location or feature is not taken lightly or without significant research and consideration regarding the impact of the change. The requests are uncommon and require a strong, supported rationale. Changes are made through formal processes maintained by the Canadian naming authorities, typically requiring extensive discussion and consultation with stakeholders and partners.

To better understand the evolution of geographical names in Canada over time, Natural Resources Canada worked with the Board's naming authorities to select a representative sample of approximately 350 name changes in Canada over 100 years.

A preliminary analysis of the sample indicates that geographical names in Canada may change due to four primary drivers: (a) addressing derogatory terminology; (b) sociopolitical and administrative changes, such as the amalgamation of communities and shifts in naming conventions; (c) the restoration of Indigenous geographical names; and (d) environmental factors resulting in physical alterations to geographic features.

* [GEGN.2/2025/1](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/).

** The full report was prepared by Shannon Denny (Canada), Natural Resources Canada. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/95/CRP.95.



The name changes will be showcased in an interactive map that illustrates the dynamic nature of geographical naming throughout Canadian history. The map is expected to be launched at the upcoming thirty-second International Cartographic Conference, to be held in Vancouver from 16 to 22 August 2025.

The report includes more information and some lessons learned in the process of developing the map and exploring geographical name changes over time.
