



United States Board
on Geographic Names
Annual Report
To the
Secretary of the Interior
Fiscal Year 2013

*Standardizing Geographic Names for the
Federal Government Since 1890*

Introduction

The United States Board on Geographic Names (U.S. BGN) approves and standardizes geographic names for the Federal Government. U.S. BGN decisions involve names for domestic, foreign, Antarctic, and undersea features. Working conjointly with the Secretary of the Interior (SOI), the U.S. BGN reduces duplication of work, personnel, and authority among agencies.

As an interagency coordinating body, the U.S. BGN includes members from the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Interior, the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Government Printing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Postal Service.

The U.S. BGN has promoted clear and effective communication throughout the Federal Government for more than 120 years. It remains a model of coordination, working closely with National Names Authorities, State Names Authorities, local communities, tribes, and international bodies promoting geographic names standardization.

Despite its long life and success, the U.S. BGN faces challenges in terms of increasing demand for geographic names, competition from commercial and crowdsourced names sources, and sharply declining budgets.

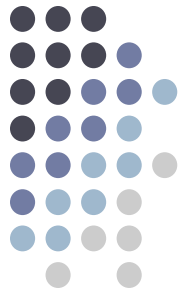
Domestic Names

Domestic Names Committee. The Domestic Names Committee (DNC) standardizes geographic names within the United States and its sovereign areas. In FY13, the Executive Secretary for Domestic Names was Mr. Lou Yost (U.S. Geological Survey) and the Chair of the DNC was Mr. Tony Gilbert (Government Printing Office). The Domestic Names Committee receives research and database support from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Actions. The DNC meets monthly and met 10 times in FY13. Its four Quarterly Review Lists introduced 239 new name proposals, and during the year 147 proposals were considered, 114 were approved, and 33 were disapproved.

Activities. One of the major accomplishments of the DNC during the year was finalizing its draft *Principles, Policies, and Procedures* (PPP), which was last revised in 1997. Two briefing papers were prepared for the Secretary of the Interior, one that specifically outlined the changes to *Policy X: Tribal Geographic Names*, and the other covering the remainder of the PPP. This effort was led by Mr. William Logan (U.S. Coast Guard), FY13 Chair of the U.S. BGN and former Chair of the DNC.

Issues. Funding limitations as a result of the Government sequester and associated budget restrictions impacted the DNC during the year. Due to travel restrictions, only one DNC member was able to attend the annual meeting of the Council of Geo-



graphic Names Authorities (COGNA) in Minneapolis, MN, from April 30 to May 4, 2013. This is the primary meeting of the State Names Authorities and an important venue for Federal and State interaction.

Additionally, challenges remain in meeting the U.S. BGN's domestic naming mission in light of longer term staff and funding reductions. The U.S. BGN and the USGS National Geospatial Program (NGP) will need to work closely together in the coming year to develop a unified plan to ensure that the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) maintains high standards of data quality while meeting the needs of the Federal Government. This will require agreement on production priorities and practices, as well as a joint effort to obtain supplemental funding to address current technology and staffing shortfalls.

Database of Domestic Names The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the single source for Federally-approved domestic names. At the end of FY13, the GNIS contained 2,720,216 names associated with 2,259,804 features. In addition to the 114 names approved by the Domestic Names Committee, 10,146 new names and 7,210 new features were added and 14,009 existing records were edited. <https://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/>

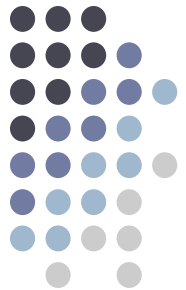
Foreign Names

Foreign Names Committee. The Foreign Names Committee (FNC) standardizes names for geographic features located in countries outside the United States and its sovereign areas, as well the names of oceans and seas . In FY13, the Executive Secretary for Foreign Names was Mr. Trent Palmer (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency) and the Chair of the FNC was Mr. Leo Dillon (Department of State). The FNC receives research and database support from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA).

Actions. The FNC meets quarterly and met four times in FY13. It addressed 37 staff recommendations, of which 36 were approved, and 1 was disapproved. The FNC also approved five topical policies and nine country policies.

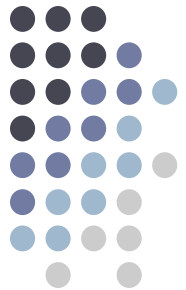
Activities. The FNC reestablished an FNC Docket to track issues, assign responsibility, and determine resolution. In addition, the FNC began work on developing a Principles, Policies, and Procedures (PPP) document, which is expected to be complete in FY14. The FNC PPP will follow the general outline of the DNC PPP, but contain information specific to foreign names.

Issues. The FNC and Foreign Names staff at NGA have been debating the merits and pitfalls of applying romanization systems that are linguistically and scientifically rigorous to names versus using less rigorous romanized names that are commonly found in a given country or area. An example is Lebanon, an Arabic-speaking country in which French-style romanized names are found on the ground, often inconsistently spelled. Recently, Arabic script place names have become available from offi-



cial sources. Application of the U.S. BGN-approved romanization system for Arabic placenames in Lebanon would result in more linguistically accurate and “reversible” spellings. However, these spellings might not be the same as those encountered by a visitor to the country.

Database of Foreign Names. The Geographic Names Database (GNDB), hosted on the NGA website, is the single source for Federally-approved foreign names. At the end of FY13, it contained 9.1 million names associated with 5.6 million features. In addition to the names for 640 features approved in this reporting period by the Foreign Names Committee, 215,000 new names and 167,000 new features were added to the database and 484,000 existing names and 497,000 existing features were edited in the database. Most names were added in Australia, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines, while most names were edited in Afghanistan, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, and the Philippines. <http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/>



Antarctic Names

Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names. The Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) standardizes geographic names in Antarctica, an area with no permanent population and no officially recognized government. In FY13, the Chair of ACAN was Mr. Jerry Mullins (USGS). With Mr. Mullins’ retirement at the end of the year, Dr. Scott Borg (National Science Foundation) was elected Chair, with Mr. Roger Payne (USGS, retired) serving as Secretary.

Actions. ACAN meets on an as-needed basis and met once in FY13. It addressed 19 name proposals, of which 9 were submitted to the Full Board for a decision and 8 were approved by the Full Board.

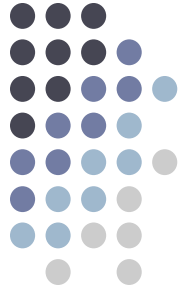
Activities. ACAN continued its efforts with the Polar Geographic Information Center (PGIC) at the University of Minnesota in reviewing and enhancing geographic coordinates that were initially derived from small scale maps and other sources. Approximately 1,000 enhancements were reviewed and made by the ACAN staff.

ACAN implemented its FY12 commemorative naming policy for features in Antarctica, which requires that the honoree’s contributions to exploration, research, or support be significant.

Issues. None.

Database of Antarctic Names The GNIS is the single source for Federally-approved Antarctic names. At the end of FY13, it contained 18,609 names associated with 14,110 features. <https://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/> and click on Search Antarctica Data link.

Undersea Feature Names



Advisory Committee on Undersea Features. The Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) standardizes geographic names for undersea features in offshore areas where there is no officially recognized government. In FY13, the Chair of ACUF was Mr. Gerry Walter (NGA) and Mr. Jimmy Nerantzis (NGA) served as Secretary.

Actions. ACUF meets on an as-needed basis and did not meet in FY 13 (meetings were held in September 2012 and November 2013). One name proposal was submitted to and approved by the Full Board. Proposals for 137 new names were submitted to ACUF towards the end of the FY and are being addressed.

Activities. ACUF continued to review its commemorative naming policies to insure that the individuals associated with name proposals have made significant contributions to oceanography or marine science.

Issues. ACUF works closely with the international organization, the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN). However, due to reductions in funding for travel, no representatives were able to attend the annual SCUFN meeting in FY13. ACUF is deliberating over the best means of addressing the large backlog of SCUFN-approved names.

Database of Undersea Feature Names. The GNDB is the single source for approved undersea feature names. At the end of FY13, it contained 10,047 names associated with 4,995 features. <http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/> and click on *Undersea Features* links.

Communications

Special Committee on Communications. The Special Committee on Communications (SCC) focused on the development of materials for Federal users and the public. The SCC meets on an as-needed basis and met twice in FY13 . The SCC is chaired by Ms. Meredith Westington (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

Activities. The SCC developed two brochures during FY13. *Official Geographic Names for Federal Publications* provides guidance on choosing an approved name for Federal use. This can be challenging, especially for foreign names, where multiple names may be approved for use in countries with multiple official languages or for features which pass through multiple countries with differing languages. *Getting the Facts Straight* targets the public and press. It provides a concise definition of the U.S. BGN and addresses common misconceptions about its mission and membership. Both of these brochures are available at http://geonames.usgs.gov/brochures_factsheets/index.html.

Full Board

Full Board. The Full Board consists of voting members from six Cabinet-level departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Government Printing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Postal Service. Mr. William Logan (U.S. Coast Guard) served as Chair of the Full Board in FY13. The Full Board, which is scheduled to meet quarterly, met four times in FY13.

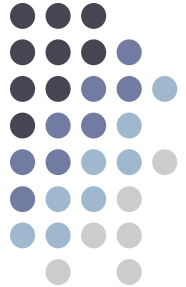
Activities. The Full Board approved a revised version of the U.S. BGN Bylaws in January 2013. The revisions reflected the current membership, Executive Secretariat consisting of the Executive Secretary for Domestic Names and the Executive Secretary for Foreign Names, changes to internal committees, and a clarification of the U.S. BGN and SOI interactions. The Bylaws were reviewed by the SOI's office and are currently being discussed before final changes are made.

Issues: Participation by Full Board members and U.S. BGN staff in national and international geographic names meetings was curtailed in FY13 due to budget cuts related to Government cost cutting and sequestration. Only one U.S. BGN member attended the Council of Geographic Naming Authorities Meeting and no members attended the annual meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada.

Resources

Web Site. The U.S. BGN maintains a web site at <http://geonames.usgs.gov/>. The web site contains links for Domestic, Foreign, Antarctic, and Undersea Feature Names, as well as a member directory and brochures/fact sheets. Links to other resources, such as Principles, Policies, and Procedures, Review Lists, Frequently Asked Questions, Romanization Systems, and the GNIS and GNDB can also be found on this site.

Credits. The cover includes images (clockwise from the upper left): Jean-Pierre Dalbéra (Notre-Dame de Paris), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and National Science Foundation (West Mata Undersea Volcano), Dave Munro—National Science Foundation (Iceberg Near Antarctic



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas R. Caldwell".

Douglas R. Caldwell
Chair
United States Board on Geographic Names