

United States Board on Geographic Names

*Standardizing Geographic Names
for the Federal Government for 125 Years*



Denali, Denali National Park, Alaska, 2015.

**Fiscal Year 2015: Annual Report to the
Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell**





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Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report to the Secretary of the Interior

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MISSION STATEMENT

Introduction

The United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) standardizes and approves geographic names for the Federal Government. The BGN's decisions involve names for domestic, foreign, Antarctic, and undersea features.

As an interagency coordinating body, the 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 Publishing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Postal Service. Working conjointly with the Secretary of the Interior (SOI), the BGN reduces duplication of work, personnel, and authority among its member agencies.

The BGN fosters clear and unambiguous communication within the Federal Government and remains a model of coordination and cooperation, working closely with Country Names Authorities, State Names Authorities, Tribes, and local communities, as well as with international naming bodies that promote geographic names standardization.



The Teedrinjik River in Alaska, formerly known as the Chandalar River, was renamed in a September 2015 decision by the Domestic Names Committee. Photography by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



1 Established by President Benjamin Harrison by Executive Order on September 4, 1890, the BGN celebrated its 125th Anniversary at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., on September 18, 2015.

This one-day event featured a Symposium with invited speakers and an Open House that included a display of artifacts associated with geographic names and maps from the Library of Congress' Geography and Map Division. Dr. David Applegate, the Acting Deputy Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, gave the welcome address on behalf of the Department of the Interior to over 100 people who attended the event.

FISCAL YEAR 2015
Items of note

2 On August 28, 2015, the Secretary of the Interior, Ms. Sally Jewell, took an historic action to rename the tallest mountain in North America. Ms. Jewell issued Secretarial Order 3337, changing the name of Mount McKinley to Denali. This was the first time that a Secretarial Order has been used to name or change the name of a feature since the BGN was established in its current form by Public Law 80-242 in 1947.



Denali in the Fall. Denali, the name for the tallest mountain in North America, is rooted in the ancestral indigenous Athabascan name meaning "the tall one." Photography by Tim Rains, National Park Service.

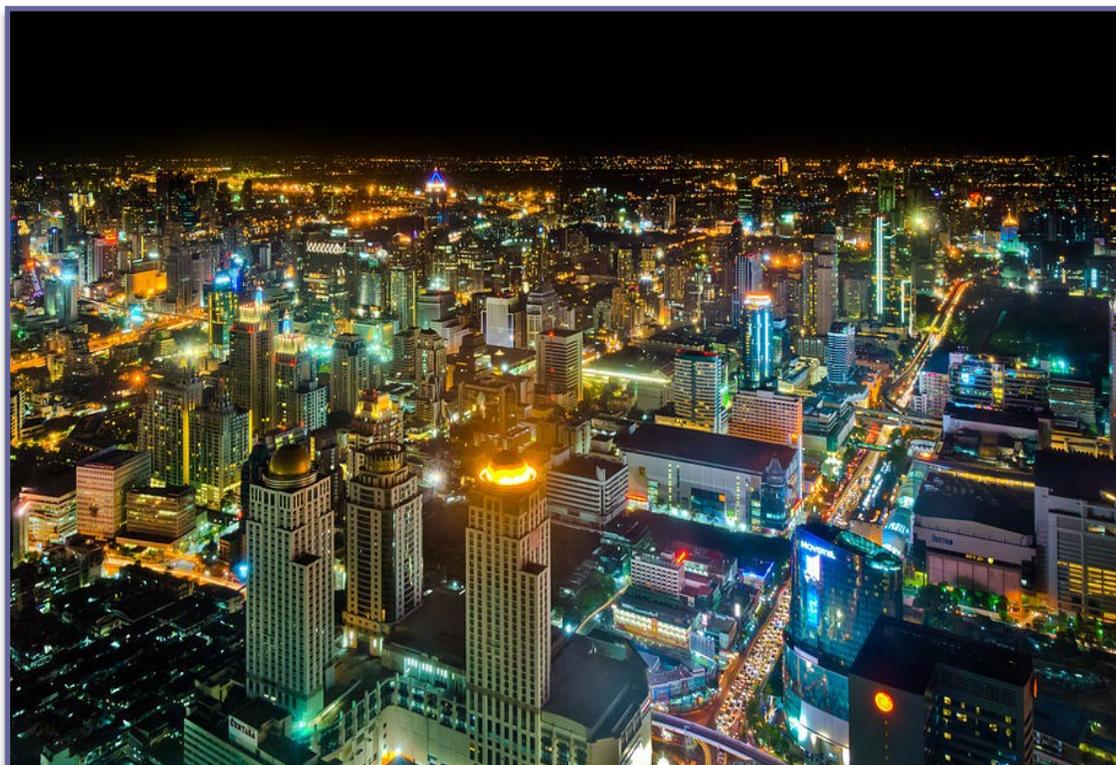
Ms. Jewell's action resolved a nearly 40-year deadlock between the BGN and the U.S. Congress on the State of Alaska's request to change the mountain's name. The deadlock resulted from the BGN's deference to the U.S. Congress when a name is under congressional consideration.



FISCAL YEAR 2015
Items of note

3 In a record-breaking decision, the Foreign Names Committee approved the world's longest name:

Krung Thep Maha Nakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahintarayutthaya Maha Dilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Buri Rom Udom Ratchaniwet Maha Sathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakka Thattiya Witsanukam Prasit.



Bangkok, Thailand. Photography by Mathias Krumbholz, released under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

The ceremonial 193-character name for Bangkok, or Krung Thep, translates as “City of angels, great city of immortals, magnificent city of the nine gems, seat of the king, city of royal palaces, home of gods incarnate, erected by Vishvakarma at Indra’s behest.”



DOMESTIC NAMES COMMITTEE *Actions, activities & issues*

The Domestic Names Committee (DNC) standardizes geographic names within the United States and its sovereign areas. In FY15, the Executive Secretary for Domestic Names was Mr. Lou Yost (U.S. Geological Survey) and the Chair of the DNC was Mr. Douglas Vandegraft (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management). The Domestic Names Committee receives research and database support from the staff of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Actions

The DNC meets monthly and in FY15 met 11 times. The April 30 meeting was held in conjunction with the Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) annual meeting in Anchorage, Alaska. The DNC's four Quarterly Review Lists introduced 183 new name proposals. During the year, 240 proposals were considered, 153 were approved, and 87 were disapproved.

Activities

The DNC prepared an information paper for the Secretary of the Interior on the background and history of the 1975 Denali name change proposal from the former Governor of Alaska, Jay S. Hammond. The paper also provided details on the DNC's "Policy I: Names Being Considered by Congress." On August 28, 2015, the Secretary of the Interior exercised her conjoint authority pursuant to Public Law 80-242 to issue Secretarial Order 3337, thereby officially and historically changing the name of Mount McKinley to Denali.

Issues

In FY15, as a result of limited funding, the DNC scaled back the collection and maintenance of names of selected manmade features in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). Ongoing modernization efforts are progressing slowly, and as a result are negatively impacting the production and dissemination of domestic geographic names.

Database of the Domestic Names Committee

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the official database for federally approved domestic names. At the end of FY15, the GNIS contained 2,732,455 names associated with 2,273,968 features. In addition to the 153 names approved by the Domestic Names Committee in FY15, 5,735 new names and 433 new features were added and 12,832 existing records were edited.

To access the GNIS, enter <http://geonames.usgs.gov> into a Web browser and select "Search Domestic Names."



FOREIGN NAMES COMMITTEE

Actions, activities & issues

The Foreign Names Committee (FNC) standardizes names for geographic features located outside the United States and its sovereign areas, as well as the names of oceans and seas. In October through May FY15, the Executive Secretary for Foreign Names was Mr. Trent Palmer (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency). Mr. Marcus Allsup (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency) served as acting Executive Secretary for Foreign Names for the remainder of FY15. The Chair of the FNC was Mr. Leo Dillon (Department of State). The FNC receives research and database support from the staff of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA).

Actions

The FNC meets quarterly and in FY15 met four times. It addressed 41 staff recommendations, all of which were approved. This represents a 14.5 percent decrease in staff recommendations over FY14. The FNC also approved eight country policies (Germany, Guyana, Japan, Panama, South Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, and Ukraine).

Activities

A working group of FNC members and staff continued to develop a Principles, Policies, and Procedures (PPP) document, which is expected to be complete in FY16. The FNC PPP will follow the general outline of the PPP of the Domestic Names Committee (DNC), but will contain information specific to foreign names.

Issues

The FNC, the Foreign Names staff at NGA, and the British Permanent Committee on Geographical Names continue debating the advantages and disadvantages of two approaches for handling geographic names in non-Roman script: applying linguistically and scientifically rigorous romanization systems versus using less-rigorous romanized names that are commonly found in a given country or area. A general decline in the use of diacritical marks is driving the debate.

The BGN decided to use French-style romanized names for Lebanese features. This approach is used in many North African countries where French is widely used even though Arabic is the official language.

Database of the Foreign Names Committee

The Geographic Names Database (GNDB), hosted on the NGA website, is the official database for federally approved foreign names. At the end of FY15, it contained 11 million names associated with 6.8 million features. In FY15, 969,461 new names and 854,327 new features were added. Most of the names added to the database were for features in China, India, Mexico, Nepal, Iran, Japan, Thailand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Vietnam, and Sierra Leone. To access the GNDB, enter <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/> into a Web browser.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANTARCTIC NAMES

Actions, activities & issues

The Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) standardizes geographic names in Antarctica, an area with no permanent population and no officially recognized government. In FY15, the Chair of ACAN was Dr. Scott Borg (National Science Foundation). Mr. Roger L. Payne (USGS, retired) served as Secretary.

Actions

ACAN meets on an as-needed basis, but did not meet in FY15 because fewer proposals were submitted during the year. There are presently three proposals pending before the committee plus 10 proposals from The United Kingdom Antarctic Place-Names Committee and one proposal from the New Zealand Geographic Board.

Activities

ACAN continued its collaboration with the Polar Geospatial Center (PGC) at the University of Minnesota. A new web-based program for quality assurance was expected to be operational by early FY15, but there were delays because of other priorities. However, work continues and the system should be tested and operational during FY16. This will allow ACAN members and staff, under the direction of the Executive Secretary, to conduct necessary work for quality assurance. Approximately 1,000 enhancements have been reviewed and made by the ACAN staff, and an additional 6,000 enhanced coordinates are ready for examination under the new tiered system of confidence. PGC is refining the remaining 7,000 coordinates.

Issues

None.

Database of the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the official database for federally approved Antarctic names. At the end of FY15, it contained 18,626 names associated with 14,127 features.

To access the Antarctic names of the GNIS, enter <http://geonames.usgs.gov/antarctic/index.html> into a Web browser and select "Search Antarctica Names."



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON UNDERSEA FEATURES

Actions, activities & issues

The Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) standardizes geographic names for undersea features in offshore areas outside national territorial waters. In FY15, Mr. Gerry Walter (NGA) continued as Chair, and Mr. Jimmy Nerantzis (NGA) continued as Secretary.

Actions and Activities

ACUF meets on an as-needed basis and in FY15 met one time. Although only meeting once, the members were engaged in the consideration of numerous undersea name proposals throughout the year. This approach (studying proposals outside the context of formal meetings) allowed for the full examination of each of the many proposals.

ACUF recommended the following undersea feature proposals for approval by the BGN during FY15. All recommendations were approved by the Full Board of the BGN and are listed below.

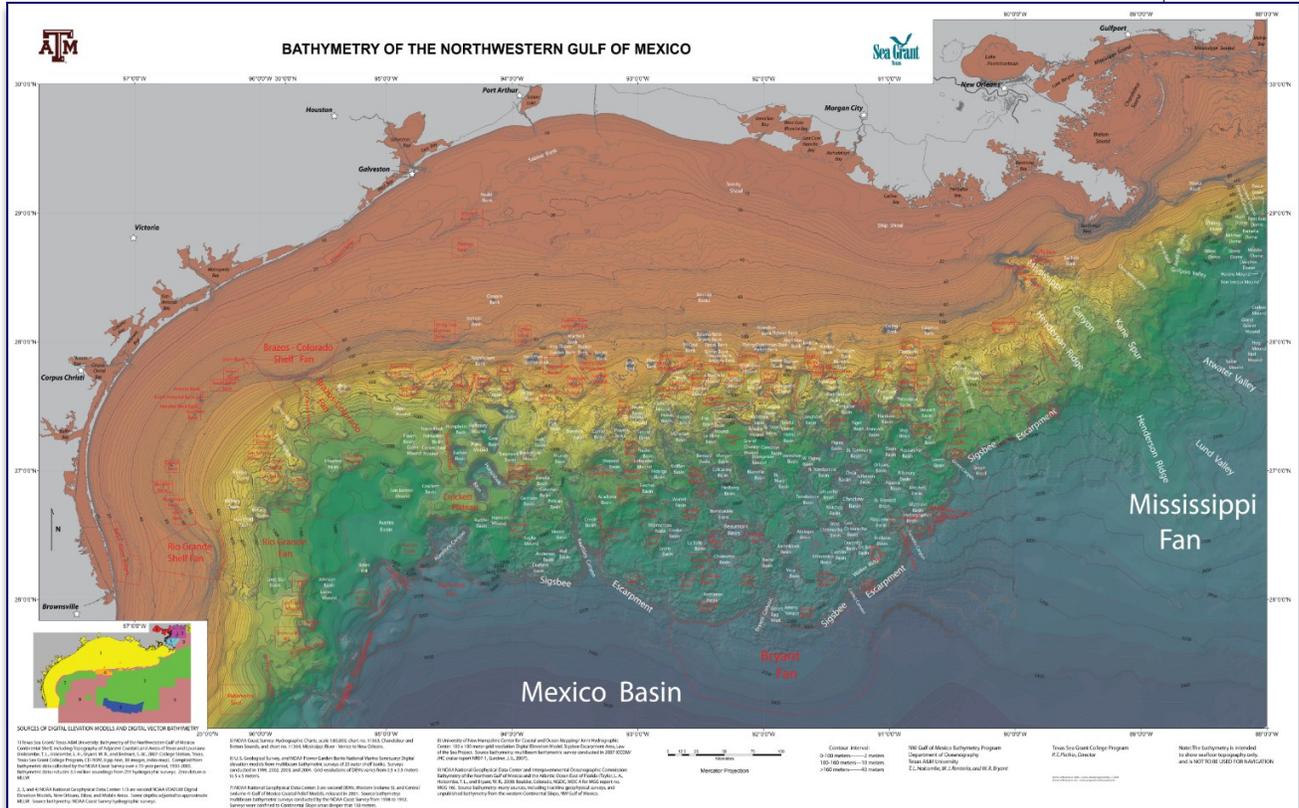
- ◆ 311 edits for South China Sea undersea features in the Geographic Names Database (GNDB). These were found through National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) research.
- ◆ 132 names for features in the Gulf of Mexico. The names, which were proposed by the Texas A&M University, College of Oceanography, are highlighted on the map shown on the following page.
- ◆ 1 name, “Axial Seamount,” for a feature located on the Juan de Fuca Ridge, in the NE Pacific Ocean. It is ~250 miles due west of the Oregon-Washington border. NOAA’s Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory submitted the name.
- ◆ 42 names for features from the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) Online Gazetteer.

A total of 486 undersea features were approved for inclusion in the Geographic Names Database (GNDB).

Continued on the next page.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON UNDERSEA FEATURES *Actions, activities & issues, continued*



The above chart highlights the newly approved undersea feature names located in the Gulf of Mexico, and referenced on the previous page. Chart courtesy of Texas A&M University, College of Oceanography.

Issues
None.

Database of the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features

The Geographic Names Database (GNDB), hosted on the NGA website, is the official database for federally approved undersea feature names. To access the Undersea Features names of the GNDB, enter <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/> into a Web browser. Once the recently approved names have been entered into the GNDB, the Undersea Features names group will contain 10,340 names associated with 5,166 features.



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS
An historic year for geographic names

The Special Committee on Communications (SCC) focuses on outreach related to the BGN and to geographic names. The SCC meets on an as-needed basis and in FY15 met 11 times. The SCC was chaired by Ms. Meredith Westington (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

Activities

The primary activity of the SCC in FY15 was the year-long preparation of the BGN’s 125th Anniversary Celebration, which commemorated the September 4, 1890, signing of an Executive Order by President Benjamin Harrison that established the BGN. The Library of Congress hosted the celebration on September 18, 2015, and presented the event in two parts: a Symposium and an Open House.

Speakers at the Symposium were invited to address the theme “Traditions and Transitions.” The keynote speaker, Dr. Mark Monmonier of Syracuse University, presented a program entitled, “Geographic Names: Roles, Rhetoric, and Resistance.” The “Traditions”-themed speakers covered aspects of international naming, the origins and evolution of the BGN, and the relationship between the BGN and the National Geographic Society, while the “Transitions”-themed speakers discussed the influence of technology on the use of geographic names as well as geographic names and crowdsourcing.



Portolan chart from 1559. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Former and current BGN Executive Secretaries and current Committee Chairs were introduced, followed by the recognition of current BGN members, former BGN members, BGN staff, former BGN staff, and visiting names authorities.

The Open House, which followed the Symposium, featured the theme “The Power of Names” and included Library of Congress items related to “Early Geographic Names,” “Traditions and Practices of the BGN,” and the “Power of Names.” Rare items included geographic names collected by Ptolemy, a second-century geographer from Alexandria, Egypt; the first cartographic instance of the name “America”; and an early American gazetteer by Jedidiah Morse. Not limited to rare, historic items, the Open House also showcased the latest map from the National Park Service, less than two weeks old, showing the newly approved name Denali.



BGN COMMITTEES *And department members*

Full Board (Standing)

Chair: Douglas Caldwell
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Vice Chair: Tony Gilbert
Government Publishing Office

Executive Secretary for Domestic Names
Lou Yost
U.S. Geological Survey

Executive Secretary for Foreign Names
Marcus Allsup
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Executive Committee (Standing)

Chair: Tony Gilbert
BGN Vice Chair
Government Publishing Office

Members:

Douglas Caldwell
BGN Chair
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Lou Yost
Executive Secretary for Domestic Names
U.S. Geological Survey

Marcus Allsup
Executive Secretary for Foreign Names
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Douglas Vandegraff
Chair, Domestic Names Committee
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Leo Dillon
Chair, Foreign Names Committee
Department of State

Domestic Names Committee (Standing)

Chair: Douglas Vandegraff
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Vice Chair: Elizabeth Kanalley
U.S. Forest Service

Foreign Names Committee (Standing)

Chair: Leo Dillon
Department of State

Vice Chair: Steven Hunter
Defense Intelligence Agency

Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (Advisory)

Chair: Dr. Scott Borg
National Science Foundation

Secretary: Roger Payne
USGS, retired

Advisory Committee on Undersea Feature Names (Advisory)

Chair: Gerald Walter
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Secretary: Jimmy Nerantzis
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Representative to International Astronomical Union

Rose Hayward, Secretary
U.S. Geological Survey

Special Communications Committee

Chair: Meredith Westington
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Department Members For October 2013-2015 Term

Department of Agriculture (Domestic Names)
Member: Emilee Blount
U.S. Forest Service

Central Intelligence Agency (Foreign Names)
Member: R. David Wert

Department of Commerce (Domestic Names and Foreign Names)
Member: Curtis C. Loy
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Department of Defense (Domestic Names and Foreign Names)
Member: Douglas Caldwell
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Government Publishing Office (Domestic Names)
Member: Tony N. Gilbert

Department of Homeland Security (Domestic Names)
Member: Eric Berman
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Department of the Interior (Domestic Names)
Member: Michael Tischler
U.S. Geological Survey

Library of Congress (Domestic Names and Foreign Names)
Member: Ralph Ehrenberg

U.S. Postal Service (Domestic Names)
Member: Gail L. Milton

Department of State (Foreign Names)
Member: Leo Dillon

For a complete list of BGN Members and Deputy Members, see http://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/member_directory.htm.



The Full Board of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names is composed of voting members from six Cabinet-level departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Government Publishing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Postal Service. Mr. Douglas Caldwell (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) served as Chair of the Full Board in FY15. The BGN Full Board is scheduled to meet on a quarterly basis, and in FY15 met four times.

FULL BOARD
Activities & issues

Activities

The BGN updated its 2001 bylaws, which were approved by the Secretary of the Interior, Ms. Sally Jewell, on September 28, 2015. The 2015 version of the bylaws updates the membership, establishes an Executive Secretariat composed of the Executive Secretaries, and clarifies the BGN's voting procedures.

Issues

Reduced staff and resources hamper the BGN's ability to fully address the demand for standardized geographic names. Due to budget and travel restrictions, the ability to coordinate names standardization activities has been limited.

RESOURCES
For your information

To access the BGN website, enter <http://geonames.usgs.gov> into a Web browser. The website contains links for Domestic, Foreign, Antarctic, and Undersea Features Names, as well as

a member directory, brochures, and fact sheets. Links to other resources, such as the Principles, Policies, and Procedures, Review Lists, Meeting Minutes, Frequently Asked Questions, and the GNIS and GNDB databases, can also be found on the BGN website.



Tony N. Gilbert, Chair
United States Board on Geographic Names