

STATE/FEDERAL ROUNDTABLE

Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) Annual Meeting

Baltimore, Maryland

July 26, 2002

In attendance were representatives of:

U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN)

BGN Staff

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

USDA Forest Service (FS)

State Representatives

Geographical Names Board of Canada

Other interested parties

The session opened at 2:07 p.m. with the BGN Executive Secretary introducing the ongoing revision of the BGN's Principles, Policies, and Procedures. The document was reviewed and major changes were noted. Those present were asked to submit comments to the Executive Secretary by the end of October. These comments will be considered before a final draft document is prepared.

A Forest Service representative suggested that an FGDC or similar format be used, with comments placed alongside the paragraph to be changed, along with information on how the comment will be addressed. It was also suggested that the revised policies be distributed for public comment for 30-60 days and that the draft be published in the Federal Register before being finalized for the Secretary of the Interior's signature.

The staff then presented a list of annotated topics for information and discussion. The topics are listed below in the order they were discussed at the meeting. There was considerable discussion of each topic, often with strong emotions and opinions, but only a synopsis is provided. Names in parentheses indicate the moderator of the topic.

1. **The maintenance of the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is everyone's responsibility. (Gasque)**

It was suggested that there is a lack of administrative names in the GNIS database, and that State Names Authorities should make efforts to ensure that someone assumes responsibility for updating the data. The quality of the data related to the names of natural features is considered reasonably good, but the coverage of administrative names is "deplorable", which is a function of availability of local data at the time of compilation as well as subsequent maintenance. Each State needs to establish one central repository to gather and review the data before submitting it to GNIS. However, it was noted by some that some incentive, specifically funding, is needed. The Geographic Names Office staff needs to solicit the input of the State Boards, and convince States and counties that their participation is worthwhile economically. A representative of

the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reported that funding may be available in the future, although likely not at the Federal level but through State-based efforts. The example of the GeoSpatial OneStop was cited. A suggestion was made that a possible resource for names could be the USGS Earth Science Corps program. These volunteers, where available, are a valuable resource to the map revision process. It was also noted that it is easier now than in the past to determine geographic coordinates.

2. When is it appropriate/necessary to contact Tribal Authorities regarding a BGN proposal, and who should bear that responsibility? (Runyon)

It was explained that the BGN is mandated to contact tribes on a “Nation-to-Nation” basis if the feature in question is wholly or partially on Tribal lands, although State Names Authorities may also contact them if they are so inclined.

There was discussion regarding whether a tribal authority should be contacted if the feature in question does not lie on tribal lands. It was felt by some that all nearby tribes should be contacted and that the States should determine who should be contacted. It was noted that according to Policy X, it is required if the Tribe had historical or cultural interest in those areas.

3. Should changing names be done simply to “restore” indigenous culture? (Harne)

The consensus of the discussion was that the Board should not give priority to one class of names over another. Culture changes over time, and current local use should be given precedence.

4. Does a lack of response indicate “no objection” or “no comment”? (Messenger)

After discussion of the topic, it was suggested that the Board might wish to adopt the format used by the Arizona Board, which sends out a form with options from which a respondent can select. This format has generated a good response.

5. Soliciting local/County/State/Federal input — it is still taking too long to receive responses. Should we invoke the one-year deadline? (Runyon)

Some representatives felt that the one-year deadline should be invoked and that other means of contacting the entity should be used, such as by e-mail or telephone.

It was explained that the one-year deadline cannot be strictly enforced, but an effort should be made to take care of business as soon as possible. The National Map will tend to alleviate mapping publication deadlines.

It was suggested that the reason for deferral of proposals be noted on the Board's Action List.

6. **Should names of pets be considered commemorative? (Hoff)**

A suggestion was made that no pet names should be considered by the BGN. The Board members present indicated this would likely be discussed at the forthcoming policy meeting.

6. **Proponents should be required to provide a justification for submitting a new name/name change. (Runyon)**

After explaining that the Domestic Geographic Name Proposal now asks the proponent to provide a reason for submitting the proposal, representatives were asked if any of the State Boards considered including this requirement. Most present stated that in most cases, the proponent does offer a reason for submitting the proposal.

7. **Do State Boards solicit input from Federal agencies before issuing their recommendations? (Furr)**

Due to a lack of remaining time, this topic was not addressed.

The Roundtable was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.