

U.S. Board on Geographic Names & DOI Efforts to reconcile derogatory geographic names

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Purpose

- Introduce the Board on Geographic Names
 - Background
 - Organization
 - Authority and function
- Summarize recent activity on derogatory geographic names
 - Secretary's Orders
 - Federal Advisory Committee
 - Additional high-profile name changes

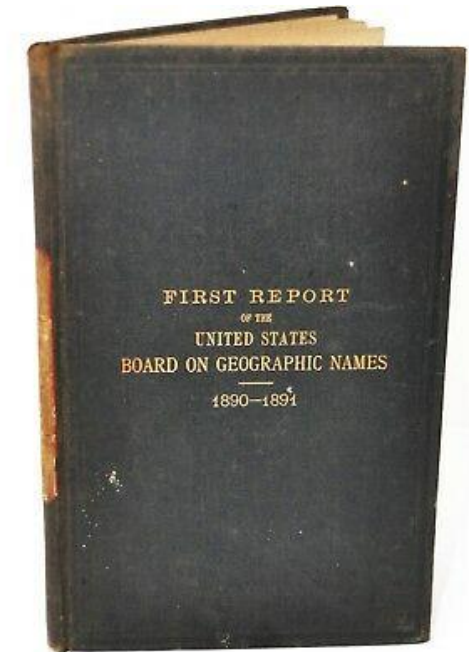
Board on Geographic Names (BGN)

- The BGN was created by an Executive Order of President Benjamin Harrison in 1890
 - Responded to the surge of exploration, mining, and settlement of western territories after the American Civil War
 - Geographic names inconsistencies and contradictions were a serious problem to surveyors, map makers, and scientists.

- Re-established in its present form by Public Law 80-242 in 1947:

"... the Secretary [of the Interior] shall promulgate in the name of the Board ... decisions with respect to geographic names, and principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography..."

- Serves as the Federal authority regarding all name discrepancies, inquiries, and new name and name change proposals
- BGN Decisions are the official names to be used on Federal maps and in Federal publications for geographic features in domestic, foreign, Antarctic, and undersea regions.

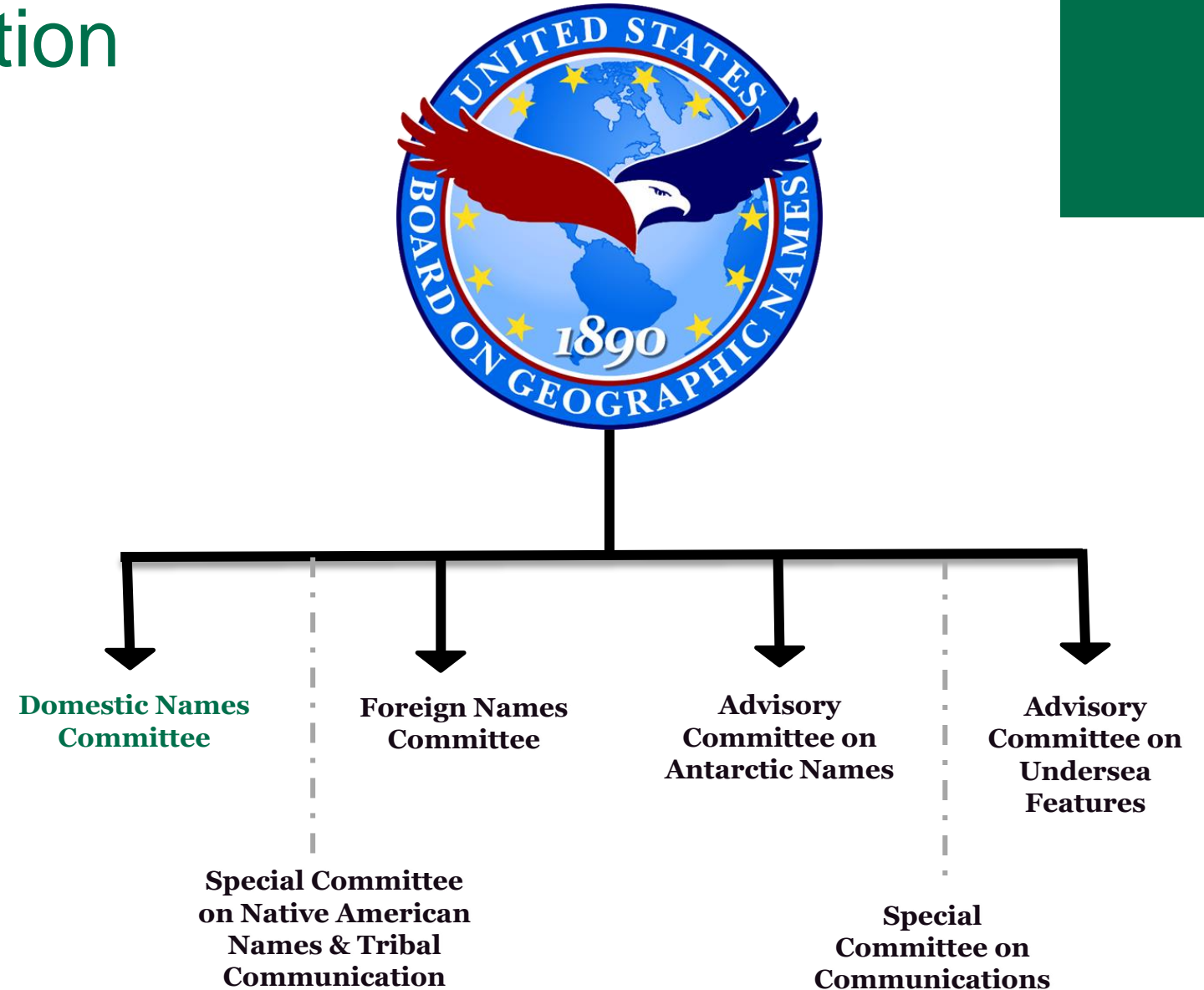


+ Federal Representation

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■ The following departments and agencies are represented on the Board:

- Central Intelligence Agency
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of the Interior
- Department of State
- Government Publishing Office
- Library of Congress
- Postal Service





The Domestic Names Committee (DNC)

- Department of Agriculture
 - U.S. Forest Service
- Department of Commerce
 - Bureau of the Census
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Department of Defense
 - National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
 - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Department of Homeland Security
- **Department of the Interior**
 - **Bureau of Indian Affairs**
 - **Bureau of Land Management**
 - **Bureau of Ocean Energy Management**
 - **Fish and Wildlife Service**
 - **National Park Service**
 - **U.S. Geological Survey**
- Government Publishing Office
- Library of Congress
- U.S. Postal Service

- Considers proposals
 - New names
 - Name, spelling or location changes
 - 50 states, associated areas, and U.S. territories
- Proposals received from the general public; organizations; local, State, Federal, Tribal governments; and others
- BGN staff prepares a case brief, adds proposal to Quarterly Review List, and conducts outreach
- Upon approval the new name/change is added to the [Geographic Names Information System \(GNIS\)](#)
- ~250-300 proposals considered each year
- Review process can take 6-8 months, up to a year, sometimes longer; many factors; each proposal considered case-by-case
- [DNC Website](#)

- By law, the BGN is responsible for all geographic names except those applying to offices or establishments of Federal agencies
- A Geographic Feature is any entity on the landscape/seascape that requires identification, location, and attribution for information of government and the public.
- The BGN's purview
 - Applies only to the names of **natural features**
 - Includes canals, channels, reservoirs, and *unincorporated* Populated Places.
 - Includes United States and its territories and outlying areas.
 - Does not include many administrative and civil features
 - Names of cultural or man-made features such as roads, streets, shopping centers, churches, schools, hospitals, or airports.
 - Administrative names such as states, counties, county equivalents, cities, towns, townships, districts, precincts, and similar legally established units.
- All current definitions, policies, and other information about the BGN are documented in the BGN Principles, Policies, and Procedures.

- Policy I: **Names Considered or Established by Congress or the President**
 - BGN will not vote if a name is pending in Congress
- Policy II: **Name Changes**
 - BGN is conservative, needs compelling reason and a replacement name
- Policy III: **Commemorative Names**
 - No names for living persons, must be deceased 5+ years, had an association with the feature or made significant contribution
- Policy IV: **Wilderness Area Geographic Names**
 - No new names in wilderness areas (or proposed wilderness) without a strong justification



Farthing Horn

Denali

■ Policy V: **Derogatory and Offensive Names**

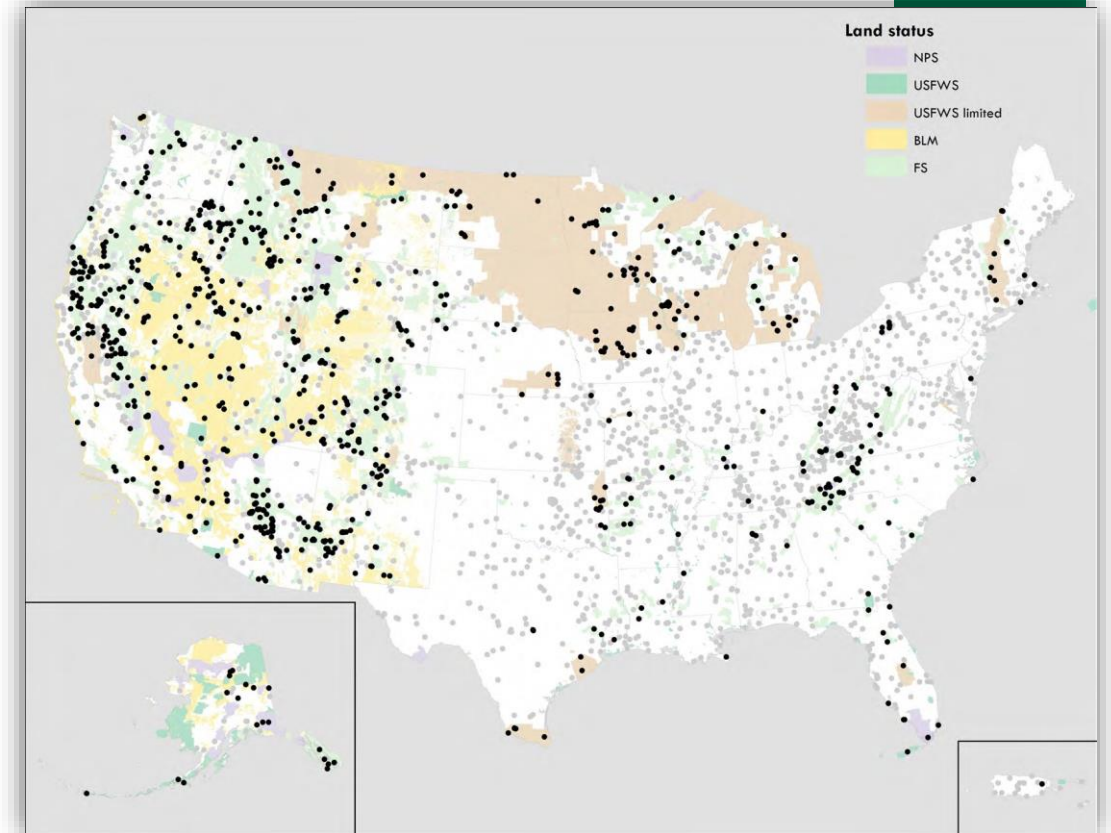
- Encourages changes to any name considered offensive by an individual or group

■ Policy VI: **Diacritics**

- Allowed in geographic names, if in Roman alphabet
- Names on Tribal Lands can include characters as long as they can be rendered in Unicode

■ Policy VII: **Duplicate and Similar Names**

- Should be avoided, eliminate confusion



Potentially derogatory geographic names across the US

DNC Policies

■ Policy VIII: **Variant Names**

- Recorded from multiple sources, needs a citation
- Provides a historical record of the feature
- Searchable in GNIS

■ Policy IX: **Long Names**

- Should be avoided (e.g. last names only, not full names)

■ Policy X: **Tribal Geographic Names**

- BGN has developed a policy that addresses Tribal Geographic Names, and has invited Tribes to engage in government-to-government consultation on this policy



Devils Tower, WY

Aloft on a Rock
Bad Gods Tower
Bear Lodge Butte
Bear Peak
Bear's House
Bear's Lair
Bear's Lodge
Bear's Tipi
Ghost Mountain
Grey Horn Butte
Grizzly Bear Lodge
Grizzly Bear's Lodge
Mateo Tepee
Mato Teepe
Mythic-owl Mountain
Penis Mountain
Tree Rock



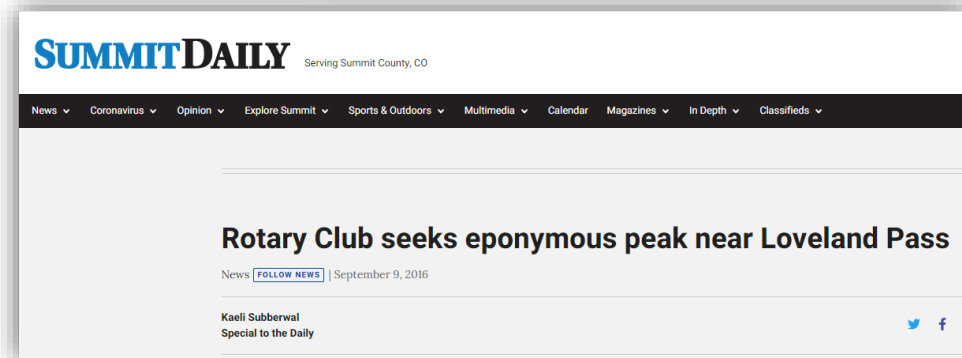
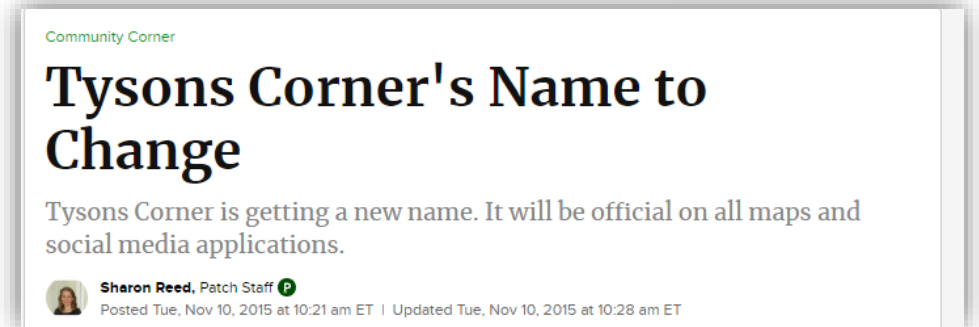
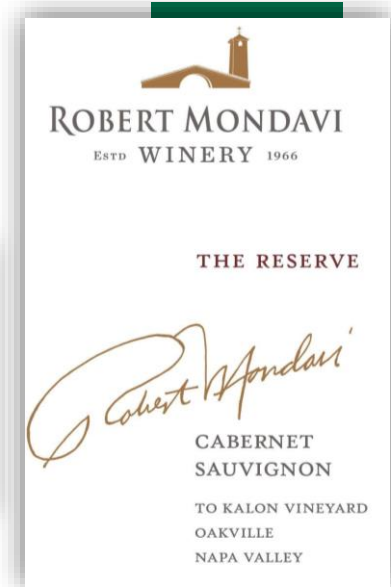
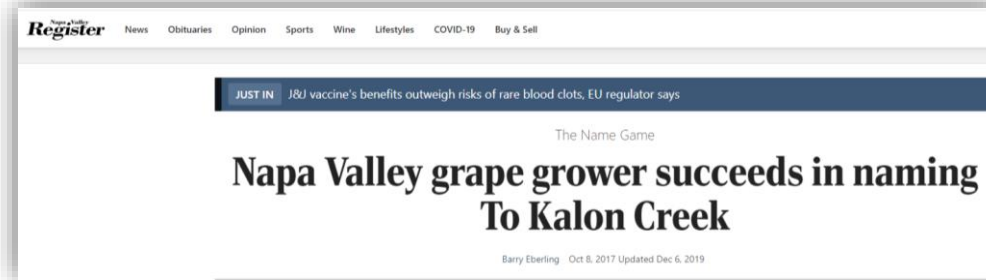
DNC Policies

■ Policy XI: **Commercial Names**

- Should be avoided, BGN should not be endorsing business or commercial product

■ Policy XII: **Animal Names**

- Allowed in rare instances



DNC Name Change Process

In processing a geographic name change, the BGN DNC and/or staff:

- Considers proposals for new names, and name, spelling, or location changes
- **Reacts and responds to a proposal**, but does not proactively assert name changes
- Receives proposals from the general public, organizations, and local, State, Federal, or Tribal governments
- Prepares a case brief, adds proposal to Quarterly Review List
- Conducts outreach/solicits opinions from local government(s), State Geographic Names Authorities (SNAs), State or Federal land management agencies, Tribal governments and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, other interested parties
- Meets monthly to consider proposals
- If approved, new name/change added to Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)

Key Stakeholders

- Local & state feedback – Community perspective
 - Individual State Names Authorities (SNAs) and Council of Geographic Names Authorities
 - Tribal communities
 - Association of American State Geologists, National States Geographic Information Council, Wilderness Society
- DNC members – Federal agency & geographic literacy perspective
- Land management agencies – “On-ground” or environmental perspective

Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)

- Database of the BGN
- Created to promulgate all names for Federal Government use
- Developed 40+ years ago, evolved from paper to digital environment
- Contains over 2.2 million features
- GNIS users are from State, Federal, Tribal, local agencies and the general public
- Contains historical and variant name information, and many administrative features

Public Search Page:

<https://usgs.gov/geonames/domestic-names>

+ Secretary's Order 3404

- Declared sq___ a derogatory term
- Created Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force
- Outlined plan to reconcile all geographic features with sq___ in name
 - Development of candidate replacement names
 - Public comment period
 - Tribal Consultations
 - Sq___ name will remain as variant
- Task Force recommendation to BGN for vote



"Racist terms have no place in our vernacular or on our federal lands. Our nation's lands and waters should be places to celebrate the outdoors and our shared cultural heritage – not to perpetuate the legacies of oppression"

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland

- 643 derogatory geographic names changed on Sept. 8, 2022
- 5 Unincorporated Populated Place names changed on Jan. 12, 2023 (2 removed from BGN review consideration)

+ Secretary's Order 3405

- Created a Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) to consider:
 - Additional derogatory terms, other than sq___
 - Federal land unit (i.e., national parks, refuges, etc.) names in addition to geographic features
 - Improvements to process that engage the public for reconciling derogatory names
- Titled *Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names* and managed by National Park Service
- The Secretary of the Interior has appointed 21 members:
 - 4 Ex-officio additional (Secretary of the Interior's Office, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and DOD)
 - 5 Tribes represented
 - 4 with civil rights representation background
 - 4 with social science background
 - 3 representing general public

Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names

From November 14-16, 2023, the Committee met at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa and voted to move the following recommendations forward to the Secretary:

- Replace the word "c--n" with "raccoon" on the landscape
- Identify several Federal land unit names as potentially derogatory
- Identify approximately 500 geographic feature names as potentially derogatory
- Create a new subcommittee on Education and Outreach



Committee members at Grand Canyon National Park - June 2023

+ Upcoming proposals of interest

Current name (State)	Proposed name	Background	Status
Kit Carson Peak (CO)	Frustum Peak, Lawrence Peak, Tabeguache Ute Peak, Mount Crestone	Named for Kit Carson, a "contested historic figure, a murderer and perpetrator of genocide"; Frustum Peak was earliest English name; locals contend that the feature has always been known as Crestone Peak and want it renamed to Mount Crestone (Crestone Peaks is the official name of the adjacent group of peaks)	Pending Colorado State Geographic Names Authority (SNA) review, other counterproposals received; strong local opposition and controversy over correct name of the feature; BGN did not approve Mount Crestone in 2011
Devils Tower (WY)	Bear Lodge	Tribes see name as offensive for a holy site; multiple Tribes agreed on proposed name; in Devils Tower NM	On hold due to Policy I
Hayden Valley (WY)	Buffalo Nations Valley	Proposed by Crow Creek Sioux Tribe. Named for Ferdinand V. Hayden, who "advocated for the genocide of indigenous people"; in Yellowstone NP	Pending NPS review
Negro Mountain (PA-MD)	Malcolm Mountain or Mount Nemesis	Change name seen as offensive to one commemorating Malcom X or the legendary name of the Black man whose death in battle led to the current name	Pending SNA review and possible counter proposals; strong opposition from locals and from a Black history group due to name's origin
Gore Range (CO)	Nuchu Range	Named for Lord Gore, who led a huge hunting expedition in the area responsible for 1000s of big game carcasses; proposed Ute word referring to Ute peoples	Pending county and SNA review
Pikes Peak (CO)	Tavá Mountain	To restore original Ute name	Pending review by county, SNA, and USFS
Negro Point (NY)	Tenkenas Point	Change name seen as offensive to Lenape name for the island the point is on	Pending all input; possible counterproposals
Cadillac Mountain (ME)	Wapuwoc Mountain	Named for Antoine La Mothe Sieur de Cadillac; change to Abenaki name for the mountain; in Acadia NP	Pending county, SNA, and NPS review
Mount Clay (NH)	Mount Roosevelt	Named for Henry Clay; proponent believes Presidential Range should include a feature for Theodore Roosevelt. Mount Reagan official name for State use (2003 resolution)	Pending county review

+ Upcoming proposals of interest

Current name (State)	Proposed name	Background	Status
Baker River (NH)	Asquamchumauke River	Named for Lt. Thomas Baker whose company destroyed a Pemigewasset Indian village; proposed name is the Abenaki name for the river	Pending county review; strong local opposition
Dago Frank Creek (AK)	Frank Creek	Named for a Chignik Bay resident from Italy(?); Chignik Bay Tribal Council opposes and says “dago” is not derogatory	Pending FWS input (feature is near a refuge); AK BGN did not approve
Mount Elbert (CO)	Mount Daisy	Named for Territorial Governor Samuel Hitt Elbert (1833-1899), “forced the Brunot Agreement upon the Ute tribe forcing their expulsion from the land”; proposed name due to daisies growing	Pending county, SNA, and USFS review
Mount Whitney (CA)	Tumanguya	Proponent believes Shoshone-Paiute name should be restored due to lack of association between Josiah Whitney and the mountain; partly in Sequoia NP	Pending county, SNA, and NPS/USFS review
Kelseyville (CA)	Konocti	unincorporated community named for Andrew Kelsey, who “enslaved, starved, abused, raped, tortured and murdered the Pomos”; proposed name is the Pomo name of a nearby mountain	Pending county, SNA review; local opposition and support; current name is ZIP code (like former name of Yokuts Val.)
Mount Woodring (WY)	Raven Peak	Named for Samuel Tilden Woodring, first superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, accused of assault; feature in Grand Teton NP	Pending county, SNA, and NPS review
Clingmans Dome (NC-TN)	Kuwohi	Restore Cherokee name; feature in Great Smokey NP	Pending SNA and NPS review
unnamed stream (CA)	Boomer Creek, Uypi Creek	County supported earlier proposal for Boomer Creek, a name in historic and local use; Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area (not federally recognized) proposed this	Pending county and SNA review
unnamed community (TX)	Starbase	SpaceX wants to name the area east of Brownsville as Starbase; unclear if this a new name or a change to existing name; may include areas in FWS lands	Not received yet; city, county reportedly support this and sent a letter to BGN

Upcoming proposals of interest

Current 3404 name	Proposed name	Background	Status
Mino-kwe jiigibiik (MI)	Burns Landing Beach	Township proposed their local name	Pending SNA review; Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians opposed
Cherry Hill Woods Sloughs (IL)	Zheshk Bitobig	Minnesota Chippewa Tribe--Mille Lacs Band proposed current and proposed names	Pending SNA review and county land manager outreach about correct Boodewaadamiimowin (Potowattamie) spelling
Habematolel Valley (CA)	Kilkenny Valley	Majority landowner proposed name for their family	Pending USFS and SNA review; Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake opposed
Aanikegamaa Lake (MI)	Swan Lake	Township proposed name	Swan Lake <u>not approved</u> by BGN 1/11/24 Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians of Michigan opposed to change; Township is not happy about and does not understand the vote
Eastman Cove (NH)	Senskwa Cove	Locals proposed local Abenaki name with "skwa" suffix, the original meaning of "sq____"	Pending county and SNA review
Mino-kwe Point, Mino-kwe Ponds, and four other names (MI)	Mino-kwe Neyaashiing, Mino-kwe Zaagigaanhs, and four other names	Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians would like the names fully in Anishinaabemowin, a change from their S.O. 3404 consultation letter	This and 5 additional changes proposed by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe will be on the April 2024 Review List for a full BGN review including county and SNA outreach; counties may not know the names were changed by S.O. 3404

Thank you!

Mike Tischler, Ph.D
Director, National Geospatial Program
Chair, U.S. Board on Geographic Names
Vice-Chair, Domestic Names Committee
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Glossary Of Acronyms

- ACAN—Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names
- ACUF—Advisory Committee on Undersea Features
- BGN—Board on Geographic Names
- DNC—Domestic Names Committee
- FNC—Foreign Names Committee
- GNIS—Geographic Names Information System
- GNS—GEOnet Names Server
- IHO/IOC GEBCO SCUFN—International Hydrographic Organization/Intergovernmental Oceanographic commission General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans Subcommittee on Undersea Features

- NGA—National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
- PCGN—Permanent Committee on Geographic Names (United Kingdom)
- SCAR—Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research
- SNAs—State names authorities
- THPO—Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
- UNGEGN—United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
- USGS—United States Geological Survey