

## Committee Membership

The GNBC is comprised of 26 members. Its Chair is appointed by the Minister of the federal Department of Natural Resources. Each of the provinces and territories is represented, so also are various federal departments concerned with mapping, archives, defence, translation, Indian reserves, national parks, and statistics. As well, the Chairs of four advisory committees (on toponymy research, nomenclature and delineation, digital toponymic services, and undersea and maritime feature names) serve as full members of the GNBC.

## The Secretariat of the Geographical Names Board of Canada

The federal Department of Natural Resources provides the GNBC's Secretariat. The Secretariat, in concert with the Chair and the representatives of the various federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions, handles, on behalf of the GNBC, all routine toponymic matters relating to Canada.

The Secretariat coordinates the information to be included in the automated and graphic name records for national use, arranges for the meetings of the GNBC and its various committees, organizes workshops and seminars, and undertakes the production of GNBC publications. It has an important role in encouraging the official use of names and in stimulating the development of standard policies. It provides a focus for contacts with other national names authorities and promotes international cooperation with the United Nations and other organizations concerned with the global standardization of names.

## Publications of the GNBC

In 2004, the brochure **Naming Canada's Geographical Features** (in French, **La dénomination des entités géographiques du Canada**) was updated. This publication informs the public of steps to follow in proposing geographical names. Copies are available free from the Secretariat.

In 2001, the GNBC updated its publication entitled **Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming**. Appendices are included on writing names used in other countries, naming in alpine areas, and on the official languages and geographical names on federal maps. This bilingual publication is available free from the Secretariat and in pdf format on the Internet at <[http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro\\_2001e.pdf](http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/pdf/prandpro_2001e.pdf)>.

Also in 2001, the GNBC published the brochure **Geographical Names** about the Secretariat and its products and services, including the GeoNames web site.

Since 1975, the Secretariat has produced, on behalf of the GNBC, a twice-yearly publication on geographical names information and toponymic developments in Canada. **Canoma** (an acronym for "names in Canada") is distributed free of charge to organizations and institutions interested in the origin, use, and standardization of geographical names. Submissions on topics relating to geographical names and naming in Canada will be considered for publication; information on current toponymic research is also welcomed.

## Other Names Dissemination Methods

The **Gazetteer of Canada Series** was initiated in 1952 to provide mapmakers and the public with authoritative information on the location and spelling of approved geographical names. The **Concise Gazetteer of Canada** was published in 1997 and contains the names of all populated places in Canada as well as the names of selected geographical features.

The **Canadian Geographical Names Data Base** (CGNDB) contains some 500,000 automated name records. Inquiries about this data base and the availability of digital data should be addressed to the Geographical Names Section, NRCAN, 634-615 Booth Street, Ottawa ON K1A 0E9.

In 1994, a copy of the CGNDB was posted on the Internet. This data base can now be found at: <[http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/search/index\\_e.php](http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/search/index_e.php)>. This data base is updated daily. Queries can be made by name, coordinates, or by CGNDB unique identifier.

The **Canadian Geographical Names Service** (CGNS) is the latest technology being used to distribute Canada's geographical names information via the Internet. Geographical names are considered an intuitive spatial reference and a basic component or fundamental layer of the country's framework data. In today's GIS-enabled world, we need accurate toponyms linked to GIS data systems and digital feature-extent information in order to realize the full benefit of the toponymic data already available. The CGNS will be a distribution centre for a cascading network of provincial/territorial/federal Geographical Names Services. It is compliant with the Web Map Server (WMS) and the Web Feature Server (WFS) specifications of the Open GIS Consortium (OGC). This technology will enable the construction of a distributed database implementing a single point of access to a national view of Canadian toponymy. See <<http://cgns.nrcan.gc.ca/>>.

ISBN 0-662-68043-X  
Cat. No. M86-28/2004

# Geographical Names and the Geographical Names Board of Canada



## Geographical Names

Geographical names provide a basic reference system throughout the world. In both their spoken and written forms, they are a significant expression of culture, and provide important direction for transportation and communications.

Definite, unambiguous designations for populated places and physical features are necessary for correct reference in resource development and planning. Standard forms of names are essential elements of reliable maps and marine charts.

The process of designating names for landscape and seascape phenomena permits the country, the provinces, and the territories to manage and protect Canada's geographical names, as an important element of our culture and heritage.

## Geographical Names Board of Canada

The need for a Canadian names authority was recognized in the late 1800s, when resource mapping beyond the frontiers of settlement and extensive immigration made it an urgent matter to manage the country's geographical names – to standardize their spelling and their application to particular features.

The Geographic Board of Canada was set up in 1897, and was succeeded by the Canadian Board on Geographic Names in 1948. In 1961, the names authority was reorganized as the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. The name was changed in 2000 to Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC).

Soon after 1897, the provinces and territories were invited to provide advice on the use, spelling, and application of names, although until 1961 decisions were ultimately made in Ottawa. At that time, the responsibility for naming was transferred to the provinces. Since 1979, the authority for naming in Indian reserves, national parks, and military reserves has been jointly held by the appropriate federal department and the province concerned. In 1984, Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories assumed responsibility for the names in their own jurisdictions. This responsibility was extended to Nunavut when the new territory was created in 1999.

Among today's roles of the GNBC as a national coordinating body are the development of standard policies for the treatment of names and terminology, the promotion of the use of official names, and the encouragement of the development of international standards in cooperation with the United Nations and other national authorities responsible for naming policies and practices.

## Guiding Principles

In 1898, a primary task for the Geographic Board was to set up standards and guidelines. Originally the Board approved a set of 13 rules of nomenclature. Changing attitudes and perceptions, in particular translation, name duplication, language treatment, and the handling of Aboriginal names, have led to periodic revisions and updates of the principles.

The GNBC now bases its work on a number of guiding principles. In summary, they are:

1. Names created by legislation are accepted.
2. Priority is given to names well established in local use.
3. Names used by postal, transportation and major utilities are accepted, if in keeping with other principles.
4. Specific limits of features must be recorded. Use of the same generic for part of a named feature as for the whole feature should be avoided.
5. Personal names are not accepted, unless exceptional circumstances exist.
6. Preferred sources of new names (i.e., where no local names are in use) are appropriate descriptive words, names of pioneers, explorers, and historical events connected with the area, names from Aboriginal languages identified with the general area, and names of persons who died during war service.
7. Names should be euphonious and in good taste.
8. A name is usually approved in a single language form in the Roman alphabet. Other forms may be sanctioned by the appropriate names authority. Names from languages other than English or French should be written in the best, recognized orthography. Names for some selected features of pan-Canadian significance are recognized in both English and French for use on federal maps and texts.
9. The spelling and accenting of names follow the rules of the language in which they are written.
10. Names of service facilities (e.g., post offices) in a community should conform with the official name of the community. Names with the same specific applied to associated features should agree in form and spelling.
11. Duplication of names should be avoided if confusion may result.
12. The generic term should be appropriate to the nature of the feature. It is recorded in either English or French by the names authority concerned.
13. Qualifying words (e.g., "upper", "west branch", "nouveau") may be used to distinguish two or more features with identical specific forms.
14. The adoption of a name of a minor feature is guided by the relative significance of the feature, familiarity with the name, and the scale of mapping available.

## Procedures for Submitting Geographical Names

The GNBC and the various provincial and territorial names authorities rarely initiate the naming of geographical features. Almost all names are submitted by the public or have been gathered through field survey programmes.

The use of unofficial names should be avoided in publications. Such names should be submitted to the appropriate provincial, territorial, or federal names authority or to the GNBC Secretariat for possible approval. This should be done well in advance of publication dates, as considerable time may be required for the approval process. The publishing of unauthorized names will not necessarily lead to their official recognition.

To facilitate prompt decisions, information for each name should indicate the reason for the proposal, provide the location of the feature by latitude and longitude, identify on a map the precise extent of the feature, and indicate the origin and meaning. Photographs and sketches should be provided if appropriate.

Reliable, preferably documented, information on corrections in the use, spelling or application of toponyms on maps and charts is welcomed by the GNBC and by the provincial and territorial authorities.

Inquiries about geographical names can be addressed to the appropriate jurisdiction or to the GNBC Secretariat.

### Director

Heritage Resource Management Branch  
Alberta Community Development  
8820 112<sup>th</sup> Street  
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### Geographical Names Office

Base Mapping and Geomatic Services Branch  
Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management  
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Victoria BC V8W 9M2

### Provincial Toponymist

Manitoba Geographical Names Program  
Manitoba Conservation  
1007 Century Street  
Winnipeg MB R3H 0W4

### Provincial Toponymist

Dept. of Environment and Local Government  
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20 McGloin Street  
Fredericton NB E3B 5H1

### Newfoundland and Labrador Geographical Names Board

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St. John's NL A1B 4J6

### Cultural Places Officer

NWT Cultural Places Program  
Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre  
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### Provincial Coordinator, Geographical Names

Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations  
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P.O. Box 1523  
Halifax NS B3J 2Y3

### Nunavut Toponymist

Culture, Languages, Elders and Youth  
Nunavut Government  
Box 310  
Igloolik NU X0A 0L0

### Ontario Geographic Names Board

Provincial Georeferencing  
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300 Water Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, North Tower  
P.O. Box 7000  
Peterborough ON K9J 8M5

### Provincial Tax Commissioner

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### President

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### Manager

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### Director, Historical Services Branch

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### Director

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### ACNUMF

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### GNBC Secretariat

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