

# BRITISH COLUMBIA'S GEOGRAPHICAL NAMING PRINCIPLES GEOGRAPHICAL NAMING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

## BACKGROUND

Geographical names are not just labels on maps and road signs; they convey aspects of the history and promise of an area that might otherwise be overlooked or forgotten by visitors and later generations. Whether preserved on maps, in texts, or through an oral tradition, they reveal patterns of settlement, exploration and migration, and mirror outside influences to our history.

Whatever their origin, geographical names are also an indispensable tool for navigation and location, forming reference points even in historic transportation and communication systems. Standard forms of geographical names, and their clear, unambiguous application to particular features are an essential element of modern maps and charts. Co-ordination of geographical naming by one authority is thus an essential element in maintaining an effective system in which physical features and populated places can be easily and accurately identified.

The application of names to geographical features is a public trust, carried out for the benefit of present and future generations. Underlying the naming process is the recognition that *not all features need a name at this time*; to preserve and enhance the aesthetic appeal of wilderness areas in the province, and to allow future generations the opportunity and privilege to name landscape features, *proponents are asked not only to explain the significance and meaning of the proposed name, but also to provide a valid reason for naming the particular feature.*

The geographical naming procedures, and the principles and policies that govern the decision-making process in British Columbia, are consistent with established procedures and practices followed in other jurisdictions in Canada. These policies and procedures are summarized in the following section; the order in which they appear does not imply a priority ranking.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

- (a) The Minister of Agriculture and Lands is responsible for naming geographical features in British Columbia. The Minister delegates this responsibility through the Director of Base Mapping and Geomatic Services Branch to the Geographical Names Unit. Reference Land Act [RSBC 1996] Chapter 245, Order in Council 672, 13 April 1988, Privy Council Order 1969-1458, Privy Council Order 1990-549 and Privy Council Order 2000-283.
- (b) The authority to name geographical features does not extend to the following types of place names:
  - names created by, or resulting from, legislation of the Provincial or Federal Government.
  - names for facilities established by other agencies such as postal authorities, railway companies and major public utilities;
  - names for land divisions established by provincial and federal departments;
  - motor vehicle transportation routes including roads, highways, freeways and bridges; and
  - regional and municipal parks, subdivisions, streets or buildings.
- (c) The adoption of a name for some geographical features is the joint responsibility of both the Province and the federal government department that administers the land in which the feature is partially or wholly situated, including: names within a national park or national park reserve, military reserve, Indian reserve or other federal territory.
- (d) Geographical features that are congruous with, or cross, inter-provincial or international boundaries are named with the joint approval of British Columbia and the appropriate province, territory or state.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES BOARD OF CANADA**

- (a) The Geographical Names Board of Canada (formerly known as the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names) is the coordinating body for provincial and territorial geographical names authorities in Canada. As a member of this committee, British Columbia endorses the geographical naming principles and procedures established by the committee.
- (b) British Columbia participates in the development of standard policies within Canada for the handling of geographical names, terminology and translation and, through the committee, encourages development of international standards for naming policies and practices.
- (c) The Geographical Names Board of Canada can act as an advisor to the Province in naming decisions and in the development of provincial policies.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL NAMING PRINCIPLES and GENERAL NAME STANDARDS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

- (a) The principles of openness and administrative fairness are followed in the geographical naming process.
- (b) Proposals for new geographical names or changes to existing names may be submitted by any interested individual or group of persons.
- (c) The Geographical Names Office does not *initiate* new names or changes to existing names for geographical features.
- (d) A geographical name, or the right to name a geographical feature, cannot be bought or sold, raffled or otherwise conferred through contest or auction.
- (e) Names of facilities established by postal authorities, railway companies and major public utilities will be accepted as official place names, if they conform to the other policies.
- (f) The Geographical Names Office will, upon request, advise any group concerned with the selection of geographical names regarding the suitability and spelling of such names. Agencies responsible for naming utilities, and government departments with statutory authority to establish names, are encouraged to consult the Geographical Names Office regarding the existence of local or historic names and the suitability and spelling of potential geographical names.
- (g) Official adoption of submitted geographical names is based on conformity with the Geographical Naming Policies and is not subject to the wish of a dominant interest group or persons.
- (h) Ownership of land does not confer the right or entitlement to name a geographical feature. Application of a name does not prejudice legitimate claims to the land.
- (i) Company or commercial product names are not acceptable as geographical names unless there is long-standing local usage of the name by the general public. Proposals for new names or changes to existing names that are intended to promote or enhance a commercial venture will not be considered.
- (j) Geographical names should be recognizable words or acceptable combinations of words, and should be in good taste. Discriminatory or derogatory names will not be considered.

## **NAMES IN GENERAL PUBLIC USE**

- (a) First priority shall be given to names with long-standing local usage by the general public. Unless there are good reasons to the contrary, this policy should prevail.
- (b) Where long-established forms of names on maps and in records conflict with extensive, preferred local usage, the latter should prevail unless it is believed that confusion might occur, derogatory or pejorative forms might result, or for some other reason the local name does not serve the public interest.
- (c) Where established names are duplicated or are similar in sound or spelling, and tend to cause confusion, local assistance will be obtained to achieve distinction among them. In adopting new names, duplication to the extent that confusion may result in a local community should be avoided.

## **APPROVING NAMES FOR UNNAMED FEATURES**

- (a) There is no urgent need to name all geographical features in the province.
- (b) Geographical names can be established for administrative purposes where there is a demonstrated need for the name. Where no local name is found to exist, the following sources of names are considered:
  - names associated with an historical event which occurred in the area;
  - names which uniquely describe the natural feature;
  - names from a native language associated with the area;
  - names of early residents associated with the area; and
  - the names of persons who died during war service.

## **LANGUAGE FORMS**

- (a) A geographical name should be adopted in a single language form.
- (b) Geographical names are adopted in Roman orthography using the standard letters and diacritics available.
- (c) The spelling and accenting of names should agree with the rules of the language in which they are written.
- (d) When a name is derived from a language other than English, the name will be adopted in a linguistically correct form acceptable to both the language community concerned and the Geographical Names Office.

## **NAMES OF SMALL FEATURES**

Except where local and historic usage dictates, the official approval of a name of a minor feature is guided by the relative significance of the feature and public familiarity with the name. Extremely small features may be recorded as unapproved names in the British Columbia Geographical Names Database until such time as a scale of mapping is available to show its accurate location.

## USE OF PERSONAL NAMES

- (a) Personal names, used for commemorative purposes, are given to geographical features posthumously; a *minimum of two years* must elapse from the date of death before a commemorative name proposal will be considered. Proposals submitted prematurely are returned to the proponent.
- (b) Notwithstanding the above, if a personal name (of either a living or deceased person) is in common local use by the general public, that name may be considered for official adoption.
- (c) When submitting a commemorative name, the proponent(s) must *demonstrate* that the proposal has been formulated objectively, and that the proposed name is acceptable to the public beyond a single or special interest group. Proposals are not accepted from the family of the deceased.
- (d) Where use of a personal name is for commemoration, the person(s) should have contributed significantly to the area where the feature is located, or to the Province, and the proponent must demonstrate that such contribution is recognized by the general public.
- (e) Geographical features are not named to commemorate the victim(s) or to mark the location of mishaps, accidents or tragedies.
- (f) A person whose contribution to an area was prescribed by the description or nature of his/her employment will not normally be considered for commemoration in this fashion.
- (g) When a nationally prominent individual is to be commemorated, both the forename and surname may be used in the geographical name. In the case of a locally or provincially prominent individual, usually only the surname *or* the given name or nickname will be considered for official adoption.
- (h) Names of non-Canadians will not be considered for application to a geographical feature unless the person to be commemorated has had a significant association with the feature or the surrounding area, and the application is in the public interest.

## INVESTIGATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES PROPOSALS

- (a) All proposals will be investigated thoroughly and objectively, adhering to the principles of openness and administrative fairness.
- (b) Proposals will be checked for the existence of other local or unofficial names. If a well established local name is determined to exist, a new name will not be approved.
- (c) The investigation of each proposal will include gathering comments on the suitability and probable degree of acceptance and usage of the proposed name from persons familiar with the area, and will include comments from some or all of these groups: · local and regional government personnel · Indian Band Councils, Tribal Chiefs, or their spokespersons · local historians and historical societies · outdoors club members · park superintendents and staff · forestry recreation officers · Conservation Officer staff · search & rescue personnel, etc.
- (d) Notwithstanding the above, the investigation of each proposal to name geographical features that are entirely within First Nation Treaty Settlement Land - as defined in a treaty ratified by a First Nation, the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada - will be referred only to that First Nation's administrative council for approval.

- (e) In the case of a commemorative name proposal, the Geographical Names Office will confirm that the proposed name is acceptable to the public beyond a single or special interest group.
- (f) Geographical naming decisions will be based on conformance with British Columbia's Geographical Naming Policies and on the results of the investigation conducted for each name proposal.

## NOTICE OF DECISION

- (a) The proponent will receive the naming decision in writing.
- (b) A name, which has been accepted for inclusion in the official geographical name records, becomes official for all intents and purposes when the Names Decision is signed by the British Columbia Representative to the Geographical Names Board of Canada. Official names are so-identified in the British Columbia Geographical Names Information System (BCGNIS) database, available on the Internet: <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/bcnames>.
- (c) The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands may defer the decision to adopt a geographical name if research yields conflicting or inconclusive results, or adoption of a name is not in the interest of the public at large.
- (d) Commemorative names are publicized in the following manner:
  - The Member of the Legislative Assembly and local governments in the area where the feature is located will be notified of decisions that commemorate area residents.
  - Commemoration of individuals or groups with province wide or national significance will be announced by press release of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands.
- (e) War casualties, whose names have been applied to geographical features in the preceding twelve months, will be announced by press release of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands during the first week of November each year.

## DOCUMENTATION

Documentation received or collected during investigation of a naming proposal is kept as part of the permanent place names files, and can be reviewed by any interested person or group. Materials can not be removed from the Geographical Names Office, but work space for research within the office is readily arranged if notice is given.

## GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES FOR MAPS AND TEXTS

- (a) In order to ensure consistency, only official place names are used on BC Lands maps and in publications. *Editors of official government maps and reports are encouraged to use only official place names when depicting or describing geographical features.* The use of unofficial names annotated with quotation marks ("") and footnotes is acceptable in other publications to fulfill operational requirements.
- (b) The use of unofficial names in publications is no assurance that they will be adopted into the official geographical names records.

## HOW TO PROPOSE A GEOGRAPHICAL NAME

Proposals should be submitted in writing directly to the Geographical Names Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and must include the following information:

- ✓ precise delineation of the feature to be named on a photocopy of a 1:50 000 or similarly detailed map;
- ✓ a valid reason for naming the particular feature at this time;
- ✓ the significance or meaning of the proposed name;
- ✓ *itemization* of all research undertaken, including a list of local sources contacted and reference materials examined to ascertain that the feature doesn't already have another local or historic name (note that the absence of a label on published maps does not guarantee that the feature is unnamed).

If the proposed name refers to the appearance of the feature (eg. Turtles Head Point), a photograph or sketch demonstrating the appearance would be appreciated; if applicable, please identify the time of day, season and aspect when namesake markings, outlines or resemblances are particularly noteworthy.

If proposing that a well-established local name be made official, photocopies of documents, maps or correspondence containing or showing prior use of the name should be included; information about the earliest use and provenance of the name is of particular interest.

### **A commemorative name proposal must *also* include the following information:**

- ✓ a brief biography of the person(s) to be commemorated, including a description of their association with the area where the feature is located, and an explanation of their unique contributions that tend to single them out for commemoration in this fashion;
- ✓ a statement of the proponent's relationship to the person(s) to be commemorated;
- ✓ evidence that the proposed name is acceptable beyond a single or special interest group.

Proposals must be signed and include a complete return address and the optional inclusion of a daytime phone number or email address.

Geographical Names Office  
Base Mapping and Geomatic Services Branch  
Integrated Land Management Bureau  
Ministry of Agriculture and Lands  
PO BOX 9355 STN PROV GOVT  
VICTORIA BC V8W 9M2  
(250) 387-9328

BC Geographical Names Information System:  
<http://ilmbwww.gov.bc.ca/bcnames>

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