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Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names (for distribution only)

Report of Canada

Submitted by Canada**

Summary

Since 2014, the activities of the Canadian national coordinating body for place names, the Geographical Names Board of Canada, have been guided by a five-year strategic plan that sets shared objectives for the country's federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities. The strategic plan includes several priorities: enhanced governance; improved functionality and interoperability of the national geographical names database; improved indigenous naming policies and partnerships; a renewed national policy for undersea and maritime feature naming; and increased awareness of the importance of authoritative geographical names.

Recent Board initiatives and activities aligned with the strategic plan include :

- A review of the approval status codes for geographical names in the national database (official, rescinded, changed, dual name, etc.). The review supports the interoperability of the database, and makes it easier for naming jurisdictions to assign clear, concise and standardized status codes to geographical names.
- A study to examine approaches to indigenous- and minority-language geographical naming in other international jurisdictions. The intent of the research was to document, analyse and summarize the policies and procedures used by a selection of national and subnational naming authorities to officially preserve and protect the language, culture and history of indigenous and/or minority place names.

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Introduction

The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) is the national coordinating body responsible for standards and policies for geographical names in Canada. The Board is established under a federal Order in Council, and comprises members from federal, provincial and territorial government departments and agencies, each with specific responsibilities for their respective jurisdictions and mandates. Working together as a multi-jurisdictional national body, GNBC members ensure that geographical names are consistently managed in Canada. The GNBC was initially established as the Geographic Board of Canada in 1897, and celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2017.

The Minister of Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) is responsible for appointing the Chairperson of the GNBC. The current Chairperson, Ms. Connie Wyatt Anderson of The Pas, Manitoba, was appointed to a five-year term in May 2015. Ms. Wyatt Anderson is a history and geography educator in the Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

The GNBC is supported by a Secretariat provided by NRCan, a department of the Government of Canada. NRCan provides infrastructure and support for the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB), the national database of authoritative geographical names and a key component of Canada's Spatial Data Infrastructure. NRCan consolidates geographical names data, spatial delineations of features, and naming decisions provided by the naming authorities of the GNBC in the CGNDB.

The GNBC accomplishes its mandate as Canada's national naming authority by: developing policies and standards for the treatment of geographical names and toponymic terminology; coordinating geographical naming activities in Canada; promoting the use of official names; and representing Canada in international toponymic forums. The GNBC meets in plenary session once each calendar year, providing a national forum to exchange knowledge, discuss issues, and make decisions on toponymic matters. Smaller working groups and advisory committees composed of GNBC members address specific topics or areas of work, and develop policies or initiatives to be considered and implemented by the Board.

Canada's Geographical Naming Authorities

Generally in Canada, the authority to officially name geographical features rests with the 13 provincial and territorial governments. Each province and territory has established procedures to investigate naming proposals for geographical features situated within its area of jurisdiction. Naming proposals involve extensive research by the jurisdictional authority and consultation with inhabitants of the region to confirm that proposed names are used and supported by the local community. The naming jurisdictions in Canada have developed standardized national guidelines (*Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming*), endorsed and adopted by the GNBC in 2011.

Several provincial and territorial jurisdictions appoint a naming board to review and recommend naming proposals, while other jurisdictions appoint a government official with expertise in toponymy. In most jurisdictions, recommendations for naming decisions are submitted for approval to a provincial or territorial Minister with legislated responsibility for

geographical names. In all cases, once names are approved by a responsible jurisdictional authority, they are recognized and endorsed as official decisions of the GNBC.

On federally-administered lands and waters, naming decisions are made in collaboration by both the provincial or territorial authority and the appropriate federal authority. Federal departments involved in geographical naming include those responsible for undersea features, and lands such as National Parks, Indian reserves, and military establishments.

Strategic Objectives of the GNBC

GNBC activities are guided by a five-year Strategic Plan determined through discussion and consensus by the federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities. The current Strategic Plan describes the GNBC priorities in an accountable and transparent way for the period 2014-2020. Performance measures indicate how the GNBC will monitor and evaluate progress toward achieving the outcomes identified in the plan. Each strategic objective outlined in the plan is intended to strengthen the effectiveness of GNBC operations, refine policies and procedures, and encourage the use, exchange and promotion of authoritative geographical names.

The 2014-2020 GNBC Strategic Plan focusses on five key overarching objectives:

1. Enhancing the effectiveness of the national naming authority,
2. Maintaining the authoritative national geographical names database,
3. Improving Indigenous geographical naming policies,
4. Establishing a national process for undersea feature naming,
5. Raising awareness of the importance of authoritative geographical names.

These objectives are implemented through several active working groups and an advisory committee, each focussed on specific priority actions outlined in the Strategic Plan. Each group is lead by a federal, provincial or territorial naming authority and comprises other jurisdictional members of the GNBC, supported by the GNBC Secretariat. The working groups and advisory committee meet regularly throughout the year, typically via videoconference, and report on activities and accomplishments at the GNBC's Annual General Meeting.

Maintaining the Canada's National Geographical Names Database

A central role of GNBC naming authorities is the gathering and dissemination of accurate information on the location, delineation and origins of Canada's geographical names. This is accomplished through management of databases in individual jurisdictions, and contribution of that data to the national repository of geographical names, the Canadian Geographical Names Database (CGNDB) maintained by the GNBC Secretariat. Collaborative activities between federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities and the GNBC Secretariat facilitate data interoperability and sharing, ensuring the ongoing update and maintenance of the national database.

In 2018, the GNBC's Interoperability Working Group initiated a survey of naming authorities to review of the approval status codes for geographical names in the national database (official, rescinded, changed, dual name, etc.). The review was to support the interoperability of the database, as well as make it easier for naming jurisdictions to assign clear,

concise and standardized status codes to geographical names. Through this work, an initial extensive collection of 52 status codes was streamlined and simplified to a concise list of six clear and interoperable codes.

Indigenous Geographical Names

Recognition and increased awareness of traditional geographical names contributes to the preservation, revitalization and strengthening of Indigenous histories, languages and cultures. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples calls for Indigenous peoples to have the right to designate and retain their own names for communities and places. The GNBC naming authorities have a long-standing interest in researching, documenting and approving place names that have traditional Indigenous origin. A recent survey by the GNBC indicates that nearly 30,000 official place names in Canada have confirmed or assumed Indigenous roots in over 50 languages or dialects. The GNBC has identified increased engagement with Indigenous communities a strategic goal, with the intention of accurately recording, storing and disseminating Indigenous place names in the national database.

The GNBC's responsibility to accurately record geographical names requires special consideration of Indigenous names and languages. These considerations include evolving orthographies; specialized character sets; accommodating the practice of naming agglomerations of features with a single toponym; officialising multiple names for a single feature; and using unique cultural generics. Accurately storing these names in the national database requires extended and evolving interoperability.

In 2017, the GNBC initiated a scan of policies in Canada related to geographical names of Indigenous origin. The intent of the project was to research, document, analyze and summarize how Canada's federal, provincial and territorial naming jurisdictions identify and preserve geographical names of Indigenous origin. In 2018, the GNBC initiated a follow-up study to examine approaches to Indigenous and minority-language geographical naming in other international jurisdictions. The intent of the research was to document, analyze and summarise the policies and procedures used by a selection of national and subnational naming authorities to officially preserve and protect the language, culture and history of Indigenous and/or minority place names.

In 2018, the GNBC Secretariat conducted a research project *Indigenous Origins: Recognizing the Language and Origins of Canadian Geographical Names*. Two researchers in Indigenous toponymy were engaged by the Secretariat, and identified the Indigenous language of origin for over 3,600 geographical names in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and in the Ottawa River watershed area.

Undersea Feature Naming

The GNBC's Advisory Committee on Undersea Feature Names is chaired and coordinated by the Canadian Hydrographic Service of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Advisory Committee is responsible for reviewing undersea and offshore surface maritime feature naming proposals for completeness and conformity with the *Principles for the Naming of Undersea and Surface Maritime Features* approved by the GNBC in 2014. The Advisory Committee investigates and researches naming proposals in collaboration with members of the GNBC to

ensure accuracy of supplied information. It then determines suitability of proposals, and recommends to the GNBC the acceptance or rejection of names of undersea and surface maritime features in Canadian waters.

Raising Awareness of Geographical Names

A key strategic objective of the GNBC is to communicate the benefits of authoritative geographical names, the naming process, and the necessity for rigorous naming standards. The desired outcome of this effort is for Canadians to recognize and appreciate the cultural, historical and practical value of geographical names as a part of their daily lives and shared cultural heritage, along with the key role played by the GNBC to coordinate authoritative geographical naming activities in Canada.

Canada's first annual Geographical Names Day was celebrated on November 13, 2018 to raise awareness of the importance of authoritative geographical names and of the activities of the GNBC. The GNBC unanimously adopted a resolution declaring Geographical Names Day to aid in raising awareness among governments and the public of authoritative geographical names and official naming processes. Geographical Names Day was communicated extensively through social media channels, including a video from Canada's Minister of Natural Resources, and celebrated through official events. Geographical Names Day will be celebrated annually in Canada each November during Geography Awareness Week to promote official names and to publicize the activities of the GNBC.

In November 2018, the GNBC released *Canada's Commemorative Map*, an interactive, online presentation of text, images and videos that highlights official geographical names of locations named to honour war casualties, significant battles, as well as military units and ships. Clickable points on the map display details on the person, thing or event that the location is named to commemorate, along with a photo and links to other authoritative information. Additional commemorative geographical names will be added in future releases of this evergreen interactive map.

Summary

The management and coordination of authoritative geographical names in Canada remains as important now as in 1897 when the national geographical naming authority was first established. The Geographical Names Board of Canada is active and committed to this task through the implementation of priorities and objectives established through its Strategic Plan outlining the direction of the Board until 2020. The GNBC is now looking forward to discussion of a follow-on strategic plan to guide its work through 2020-2025.

Progress on priorities and objectives will be monitored, and reviewed in depth. Any necessary adjustments will be made to evolve and adapt the priorities and objectives toward ultimately realizing the vision outlined in the Plan. The successful execution of this Strategic Plan will help to ensure that Canadians can continue to rely on accurate and authoritative geographical names as an important aspect of culture and heritage, and as a fundamental component of Canada's Spatial Data Infrastructure.