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English

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**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

Report of the United States Board on Geographic Names

Submitted by the United States of America**

* GEGN.2/2025/1

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Mission Statement and Introduction

The United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), on behalf of the Federal Government, approves new and revised names of geographic features, following the standardization guidelines developed by the BGN. These names are the official names to be used on Federal maps and in Federal publications for geographic features in domestic, foreign, Antarctic, and undersea regions. Members of the BGN are from the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, the Interior, and State, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Government Publishing Office, the Library of Congress, and the Postal Service, each of which align with the Domestic Names Committee (DNC), the Foreign Names Committee (FNC), or both. The head of each department and agency represented on the BGN appoints one principal member and may also designate one or more deputy members. All members serve two-year terms and may be reappointed to unlimited successive terms.

By working conjointly with the Secretary of the Interior (SOI), the BGN reduces duplication of work, personnel, and authority among its member agencies to foster clear and unambiguous communication within the Federal Government.

The BGN is recognized as a model of international coordination and cooperation with country names authorities, State names authorities, Tribes, and local communities, as well as with international bodies that promote geographic names standardization.

In this age of geographic information systems, the internet, and homeland defense, geographic names are even more important and more challenging. Applying the latest technology, the BGN continues its mission to serve the Federal Government and the public as a central authority to which inquiries and problems regarding current names can be addressed and proposals for new names and name changes can be submitted.

The following pages tell the story of the significant work that the Standing Committees, Advisory Committees, and Special Committees have performed over the past year and reflects the effort that goes into the toponymic process.

Domestic Names Committee

The Domestic Names Committee (DNC) standardizes the names of geographic features within the United States and its sovereign areas. The DNC receives research and database support from the USGS.

Actions

The DNC met 11 times in FY24. The DNC's four Quarterly Review Lists comprised 191 new name and name change proposals. In FY24, the DNC considered 113 proposals, of which 80 new names and changes were approved, and 33 were disapproved.

Activities

The Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names, established in response to S.O. 3405, met November 14-16, 2023 in Honolulu, Hawaii and in June 10-11, 2024 in Rapid City, South Dakota. On July 29, 2024, the Advisory Committee sent its set of recommendations to Secretary Haaland. On September 17, 2024, Howard Valandra, Chair of the Advisory Committee, presented on the work of the Advisory Committee to BGN members and staff, and State Names Authorities and advisors at the Council on Geographic Names (CoGNA) annual meeting.

The DNC approved a proposal to change the name Clingmans Dome to Kuwohi for the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, on the boundary of Tennessee and North

Carolina. Kuwohi is the Cherokee name for the mountain that translates to “mulberry place.” The name Kuwohi had received broad formal support from multiple local governments and organizations in Tennessee and North Carolina.

The DNC approved a proposal to change the name Swastika Lake to Knight Lake within Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest in Wyoming. Knight Lake commemorates Samuel H. Knight (1892-1975), a University of Wyoming professor who in 1925 established the nearby University of Wyoming Science Camp.

The DNC welcomed Dr. Shellie Zahniser as the new Executive Secretary for Domestic Names, effective May 6. The DNC is also thankful to those on detail as Executive Secretary in FY24.

Through FY24, the DNC continued to undergo a review of its existing policies and procedures, including work on a revised DNC Proposal Form. The objectives of a revised Proposal Form include acquiring more information from proponents on new name and name change proposals, discouraging potentially frivolous proposals, addressing possible loopholes in existing policy, and helping DNC staff to more efficiently organize and process new proposals. DNC staff continue to solicit feedback from DNC members and State Names Authorities in the revision process.

DNC staff continues to provide information in response to numerous public and media inquiries relating to a proposal to change the name Kelseyville to Konocti, for an unincorporated populated place in Lake County, California. The Lake County Board of Supervisors added the question of support for this name change to the November 5, 2024 ballot, and the local residents voted not to approve the name change. However, the Lake County Board of Supervisors sent a letter to the DNC and California Advisory Committee on Geographic Names (CACGN) in December 2024 supporting the name change to Konocti.

DNC staff and members attended the CoGNA annual meeting in Columbia, Missouri September 16-19, and engaged in productive conversations with State Names Authorities and organizations concerned with geographic names.

Issues

DNC staff continues to respond to inquiries from interested parties, including local, State, Federal, and Tribal agencies, the general public, and the media regarding BGN’s policies and procedures for submitting new name and name change proposals. DNC staff received many inquiries from the general public regarding issues of geographic names that might be considered offensive or derogatory.

In FY24, DNC staff and members continued discuss approaches for improving Tribal engagement in the geographic feature naming and renaming process. In particular, there is concern of lack of input from Tribal governments on name cases with cultural association with a Tribe, perhaps owing to Tribal lack of awareness of cases, lack of resources to consider naming issues, distrust in the process, or other difficulties.

A proponent of three name changes in Alaska asked if the DNC would be willing to bypass the Alaska Board on Geographic Names’ review process and expedite a Federal decision. The proponent was advised that due to limited resources and staff priorities, the Alaska Board on Geographic Names is not likely to issue its recommendation until 2025. While the DNC decided not to bypass the Alaska Board, the inquiry raises the issue of State Names Authorities’ lack of resources contributing to lengthy review processes at both State and Federal levels.

Database of the Domestic Names Committee

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the official database for federally approved domestic names. The GNIS staff routinely enters BGN-approved names to the database. Additional edits and variants were added to GNIS based on research conducted by the BGN staff. GNIS staff continues to respond to inquiries from Tribal, Federal, State, and local officials and the general public.

GNIS staff continually works with the U.S. Census Bureau to add and update records in the database.

Significant progress has been made on the development of new tools to replace the current suite for GNIS and Landforms. These two applications will be combined into one in FY25. The new Cells application was released, allowing cell name changes to be completed and a new 30x60 minute grid over Alaska to be created. Development began on displaying features with unknown coordinates. The features will be represented in the GNIS application, despite not having a location. These will be available in FY25.

GNIS staff continue adding to the collection of ridge, range, summit, valley, and arroyo landforms across the United States. There were 15,000 features remaining to be collected at the end of FY24. Collection was affected in FY24 due to a database migration. This required the application to be completely rewritten to remove any ArcServer 11.2 dependencies and move it to ArcGIS Enterprise SDK. This took the application down for three weeks, completely stopping any collection.

After many years of development, Antarctica-staged products are available for download. Those can be found at: <https://prd-tnm.s3.amazonaws.com/index.html?prefix=StagedProducts/GeographicNames/Antarctica/>

There was a change in staffing with the GNIS Manager in FY24. As a part of this transition, the GNIS Manager box was retired, all inquiries about GNIS should now be sent to tnm_help@usgs.gov.

To begin a feature search in the GNIS database of the USGS, please visit <https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names>.

Foreign Names Committee

The Foreign Names Committee (FNC) standardizes names for geographic features located outside the United States and its sovereign areas, in addition to oceans and seas. The FNC receives research and database support from the staff of the NGA.

Actions

The FNC met virtually four times in FY24 and considered and approved 32 staff recommendations. During the start of FY24, the FNC finalized one special electronic vote between scheduled quarterly meetings, approving changes to the Cook Islands and Niue that recognized their sovereign status as independent political entities. The Foreign Names staff at NGA prepared, and the FNC approved, three country policies: Bahrain, Iran, and Sudan. The FNC also took under review policies for Ireland and Romania. Country policies are reference documents that comprehensively address the linguistic and political situations affecting place name collection in a specific country.

Additionally, the committee approved two changes to the FNC Policies, Principles, and Procedures (PPP), the first providing detailed guidance for the addition, modification and

rescindment of Conventional names, and the second, allowing cartographers and other GIS practitioners greater flexibility with the display of labels of Conventional and anglicized names with or without the root generic term.

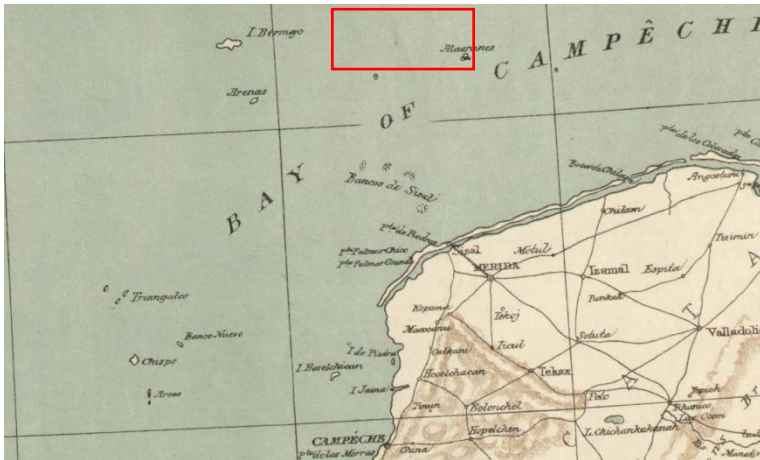


Figure 1. A curious toponym was rediscovered as part of a Mexico administrative subdivision review, Islote Bermeja (red box), which does not actually exist. First seen on the 1539 map "El Yucatán e Islas Adyacentes," depiction of Islote Bermeja on mapping persisted to the present day. It was not until 2008 when the islet's existence was scrutinized, and it can now be found in Geographic Names Database (GNDB) historical holdings. (Shown here, an 1881 map depicting "I. Bermejo" courtesy of Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006635259/>)

Activities

A major highlight for FY24 was that after nearly five years of exhaustive development as part of the Foundation GEOINT Modernization (FG Mod) program, NGA's new production system and the Geographic Names Server (GNS) dissemination site reached Full Operating Capability. A collective effort that involved Government and the private sector stakeholders, the resulting comprehensively updated systems better serve the needs of the BGN and its community of Federal customers. Further development of new capabilities has slowed significantly while maintenance and software deployments will still be scheduled approximately every 10 weeks. The FNC can be contacted at geonames@nga.mil for a demonstration of the new GNS service.

In April, FNC staff and UK counterparts on the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) restarted the in-person Toponymic Exchange after a five-year hiatus. PCGN hosted two FNC staff members at their Royal Geographical Society office in London, allowing for dynamic and in-depth discussions about geographic names standardization issues of common US-UK import, and providing the FNC staff the opportunity to directly contribute to real world projects in support of the PCGN.

Likewise, the FNC Secretariat and staff continued their preparations for November's 34th BGN/PCGN Conference, the first in-person BGN-PCGN engagement since the 33rd Conference in 2019. The Secretariat and staff coordinated with BGN and foreign partners on logistics, participation, attendance, and formal conferences submissions, set to cover a diverse array of geographic names standardization topics, romanization issues, and technical matters. The event was hosted at NGA's Washington headquarters for the first time.

In February, the Executive Secretary and select staff visited with Republic of Korea partners in Daejeon, South Korea to discuss geographic names romanization and standardization over the

Korea Peninsula. Subsequently, they met with United States Forces Korea (USFK) personnel to discuss how NGA and the FNC can better provide names and boundaries data to USFK joint forces.

Issues

Ensuring BGN romanization systems remain current, accurate and relevant to the needs of the committee remains a central concern of the staff. The staff coordinated with PCGN on updates to the system for Nepali and took under consideration further additions to the system for Maldivian and potential new systems for the romanization of Tibetan, Punjabi, and Mongolian script place names. The FNC continued its discussion with PCGN on a joint implementation of the BGN/PCGN 2023 Romanization Agreement for Uyghur.

The committee continued to monitor evolving administrative structures and their seats of countries around the world. In FY24, significant changes were addressed by the FNC for Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Hungary, Iceland, North Korea, Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.

Database of the Foreign Names Committee

The Geographic Names Server (GNS), hosted and maintained by NGA, is the sole authoritative source for federally approved foreign names. At the end of FY24, it contained 14.51 million names associated with 8.92 million features. In FY24, 644,101 new names and 504,895 new features were added. Since the deployment of the new database maintenance system in 2022, production has continued at a steady upward trend. Most of the names added to the database this year were for features in Finland, Brazil, China, Russia, South Korea, Nepal, North Korea, Iran, Argentina, Burma, Peru, and Japan.

To begin a feature search in the GNS database, please visit <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html>.



Figure 2. At September's FNC 419, the committee approved the addition of the Conventional name "Bear Island" for the remote island of Bjørnøya, Svalbard. Located between North Cape, Norway and Spitsbergen, Svalbard, the island is home to a nature preserve, meteorological station, and helicopter landing platform. (Map courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.)

Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names

The Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) standardizes geographic names in Antarctica for use by the United States Government. Antarctica is an area with no permanent population and no officially recognized government. ACAN receives research and database support from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Actions

ACAN held three virtual meetings in FY24, during which three proposals, submitted by individuals and organizations in the USA, were recommended to the Full Board for approval.

ACAN also recommended approval of 21 names submitted by the United Kingdom-Antarctic Place Names Committee (UK-APC).

Activities

The chair, secretary, and staff continued to coordinate with naming authorities in the United Kingdom and New Zealand in accordance with bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest and the consideration of new names for features on the continent.

ACAN staff, in coordination with the Polar Geographic Center (PGC) at the University of Minnesota, continue to address the challenges around the improvement of geographic feature coordinates. Enhanced coordinates for 11,120 features have been examined and updated in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). There remain 250 to 300 entries that are not verified, which will require manual evaluation to rectify. The descriptions appended to many of ACAN's earlier decisions are proving difficult to interpret. In an attempt to address the problem, the ACAN representative from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) is working with PGC to explore possible options that take advantage of NGA expertise and enhanced imagery to determine if there is a reasonable way to resolve the ambiguities.

The Antarctic Map Viewer, developed by USGS, is now fully operational and serves as an essential tool for ACAN staff. The viewer allows users to display names and points by geographic coordinates, as well as existing names in the vicinity of the searched name.

The ACAN chair and staff have streamlined procedures for processing issues and tasks that are pending before ACAN.

Issues

Since 2013, technical limitations have prevented the submission of newly approved names, corrections, and enhancements to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica (CGA). USGS and PGC have made significant progress toward resolving the issue and it is hoped that an updated file, including all 14,000+ Antarctic entries can be transmitted soon.

A comparison of GNIS and the SCAR CGA demonstrated that there are differences in feature classes between the two datasets. These differences will take time to resolve.

A number of features in GNIS apply to man-made ("administrative") features. These have not been reviewed or verified in many years, and as such, the data are likely to be incomplete and inaccurate. The National Science Foundation, as managers of the U.S. Antarctic Program, sees considerable value in maintaining information on permanent and seasonally operated facilities. ACAN will attempt to determine possible sources for authoritative information.

For over a year, the proposal form for Antarctic names has been a fillable pdf, meaning the proponent must download, complete, and submit the form to the BGN Executive Secretary. The BGN staff continues to explore the possibility of creating a fully interactive online proposal form.

Database of the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the official database for federally approved Antarctic names; see <https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-antarctica/public/search/names>.

Advisory Committee on Undersea Features

The Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) was established in 1963 as a committee of experts in the ocean sciences, to advise the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) on matters related to undersea features. As an advisory committee, ACUF does not have approval authority, but rather recommends actions for approval by the BGN. ACUF advises the standardization of geographic names for undersea features beyond the 12-nautical mile limit of the territorial sea of all nations. ACUF receives research and database support from the BGN staff at NGA and technical support from the Maritime Safety Office and the Office of Geography.

Actions

ACUF meets on a semi-quarterly basis, as needed. The committee met four times in FY24 (ACUF 365, 366, ACUF 367, and ACUF 368). The committee recommended 119 new name proposals and updates to an additional fourteen existing features. A total of 116 feature name proposals and 13 modifications to existing feature locations and/or names originated from internal ACUF efforts to harmonize the BGN database for U.S. government use with names approved by the GEBCO Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN). Figure 1 depicts one of the name proposals approved by ACUF and the BGN for FY24. This feature, a mud volcano that ACUF designated as a seamount, has led ACUF to further inquire into the inclusion of a mud volcano feature designation in its database in FY25.

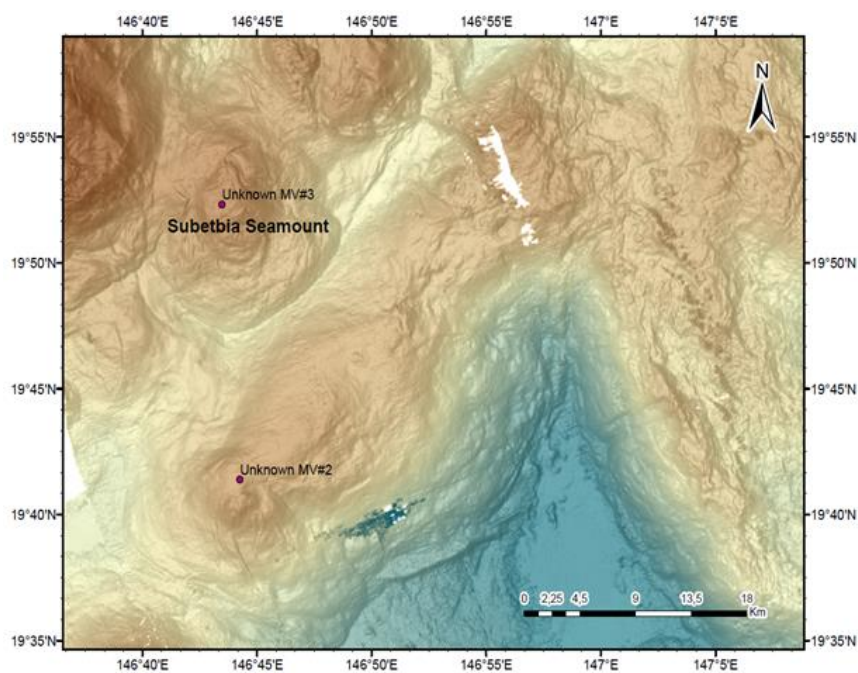


Figure 3. Image depicting Subetbia Seamount, one of several mud volcanoes in the Pacific Ocean near the Mariana Islands that were proposed by US Fish and Wildlife, recommended by ACUF, and approved by the BGN in FY24.

Activities

ACUF continued to work closely with GEBCO-SCUFN, the international counterpart to ACUF. SCUFN held its 36th annual meeting in Wollongong, Australia in November 2023, and, consequentially, voted to indefinitely freeze all consideration of undersea names in the South China Sea due to policy disagreements among member states in the region. SCUFN held its 37th meeting in Jeju City, Republic of Korea in June 2024, and approved 111 undersea features that were reviewed by ACUF as part of its fast-track process.

ACUF continued a “fast-track” recommendation process for names approved by SCUFN. In most cases, these names are adopted as is, though some exceptions do exist, for example, when names approved by SCUFN require modification to align with BGN policies, or if alternative names for the same feature have already been approved by the BGN.

NGA’s completed database modernization, which began initial operation in July 2022, continues operations with periodic updates of its production system, which is based within Esri’s ArcGIS Pro. The updated dissemination site, the Geographic Names Server (GNS), was demonstrated at SCUFN-36, which included a question-and-answer session for SCUFN attendees. ACUF’s undersea feature names are part of the larger Geographic Names Database (GNDB), which is the official repository of the BGN’s foreign geographic names standardization program data.

The GNDB remains a single point-based system and will not be updated to include polylines and polygons for the named features in its database, which was an update considered as part of the database modernization project. SCUFN’s GEBCO Gazetteer includes polylines and polygon features, which has led to feature coordinate differences between some of the same features approved by both ACUF and SCUFN. Additionally, the GNDB is not slated to include an update to export data consistent with the S-100 schema as SCUFN had requested.

Issues

Standard Naming-International Coordination

ACUF continues to discuss differences between SCUFN-approved names and ACUF recommended modifications. While there may be geopolitical reasons to explain the differences between undersea feature names in the GNDB as compared to the SCUFN gazetteer, ACUF strives to minimize the differences while respecting BGN policies. ACUF consistently discusses the differences with SCUFN, including in submission of a report delivered during the 37th SCUFN meeting.

As a result of ACUF’s report, SCUFN will now require single point coordinates for each new feature name proposal. Since the GNDB is a single point-based system, this will ensure that ACUF and SCUFN feature coordinates are standardized, and ACUF will no longer have to calculate single point centroid coordinates for future features that ACUF adopts from SCUFN’s GEBCO Gazetteer.

To date, ACUF includes SCUFN approved names as variant names when there are differences between ACUF and SCUFN approved names (this is generally a result of ACUF’s and SCUFN’s differing romanization systems).

ACUF continues to work with Marine Regions, a service that supports integrated marine data products and is managed by the Flanders Marine Institute of Belgium. Marine Regions continues to work with both ACUF and SCUFN to discuss differences between the two gazetteers.

Bulk Submission of Names

During FY24, the Smithsonian Institute reached out to ACUF to discuss submission of thirty undersea feature names associated with the multiyear, multiagency Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities (MDBC) Partnership effort to restore ecosystems impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The ACUF Secretary provided documentation to the Smithsonian to facilitate the bulk submission of names. ACUF expects to receive a names proposal in FY25.

Database of the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features

The NGA GEOnet Names Server (GNS), hosted and maintained by NGA, is the single source for Federally approved undersea feature names. At the end of FY24, it contained 10,957 names associated with 5,936 features. To begin a feature search in the GNS database, visit <https://usgs.gov/geonames/undersea-features> or <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/index.html>.

Special Committee on Communications

The Special Committee on Communications (SCC) focuses on outreach initiatives for projects specifically related to the BGN and geographic names. The Chair position has been vacant since July of 2024. The SCC's membership is open to anyone actively or retired from serving on a BGN Committee.

Actions

The SCC meets on an as-needed basis and did not meet in FY 24. The Chair of the SCC met three times with Canadian representatives from the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) USA/Canada Division in a virtual forum along with the Executive Secretary and a Member of the DNC.

Activities

The Chair attended the UNGEGN Bureau and Division meeting on April 12, 2024. The USA/Canada Division was tasked with presenting about our division. Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN) presented about the division's history and future plans.

Issues

At the end of 2024, this committee was vacant and the BGN is determining who will be filling the Chair position in FY25.

Special Committee on Native American Names and Tribal Communications

The Special Committee on Native American Names and Tribal Communications (SCNANTC) was initially established in 2010 to revise the Tribal Geographic Names Policy (DNC Policy X) of the [Principles, Policies and Procedures of Domestic Geographic Names](#) (PPP). Following implementation of Policy X, BGN received minimal input from Tribes on received proposals, and very few proposals for new names/name changes from Tribes. The DNC decided to reconstitute the SCNANTC, with the task of exploring ways to enhance or improve Tribal communication and to encourage Tribal participation in the BGN process. The SCNTAC also was tasked with investigating issues concerning adoption of Tribal language names. The SCNANTC is comprised of interested BGN members and additional experts from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian, who provide their expertise. A BGN full-board member from the Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA FS) is the current Chair of the SCNANTC.

Actions

The SCNANTC meets monthly following the standing DNC meeting. Additional meetings are called as necessary

Activities

In FY24, the SCNATC provided two BGN Overview Briefings at Tribal venues, in an effort to deepen and expand relationships with Tribes and to provide information on how Tribes may submit geographic names to the BGN and/or comment on any other proposals received by the BGN.

1. [Association of Tribal Archives Libraries and Museums \(ATALM\)](#), 24-26 October, 2023, Oklahoma City, OK.
2. [National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers](#) Conference, 12-15 August, 2024, Ho-Chunk Nation, Wisconsin Dells, WI.

Issues

The Special Committee is working to increase input from Tribal governments, to include receiving Tribal proposals and comments on all BGN proposals that Tribes believe to be of interest through attending Tribal conferences and direct communications when contacts are known.

Developing a workable process for equitable handling of more than one proposal from different Tribal governments for the same geographic feature continues to be a challenge as each Tribe operates differently.

The Special Committee is seeking ways to include unusual writing marks and characters for Tribal names that cannot be represented in Geographic Names Information System (GNIS).