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Introduction

Greetings! This is the second newsletter published by COGNA. In this issue Wayne Furr discusses what an SNA can expect from the annual COGNA conference and Jennifer Runyon and Betsy Kannally explain the changes to Native American geographic naming protocol. Enjoy!

Being a State Names Authority and your association with COGNA

During the first meeting held in 1977 members decided that it was necessary to meet on a regular basis. As a result state naming representatives (SNA) have been able to discuss issues of mutual concern and to establish standards and procedures for use throughout the nation. In addition, SNA’s are able to meet with members of the United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN), to understand and discuss policies and procedures, to learn more about the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), and to discuss the public’s interest in the naming process.

As you probably know, COGNA was established to arrange a dependable planning and training mechanism through its annual seminar, to carry out certain work directed by its members, and to provide a central office with communication as its purpose. The principal business of COGNA is conducted at the annual business meeting held at the seminar.

Each year a variety of cities and states around the U.S. host the COGNA Annual Geographic Names Seminars, providing the opportunity for attendees to observe how different SNAs work. The annual seminars are designed as beneficial, enjoyable training sessions for anyone involved with geographic names. As an SNA, you have the opportunity to build a relationship with other SNAs, who are the staff and members of the Domestic Names Committee (DNC) of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names USBGN.
Being a State Names Authority and your association with COGNA continued...

Common elements of the program at COGNA seminars include the following:

1. A meeting of the DNC, USBGN.
2. A Roundtable Workshop discussion between the states, the DNC staff and members.
3. A chance to meet the hosting state’s SNA or observe one of their meetings.
4. Geographic Names training on items such as the Principles, Policies, and Procedures.
5. Academic papers and panel discussions focused on training.
6. Participate in the annual business meeting of the COGNA.
7. Engage in the Field Workshop to hear about the local area geographic names.

We hope we have convinced you to join us in Baton Rouge, LA, for the 2019 Annual Seminar. Although planning is just getting underway, the target date for the conference is March 25 through March 29 at the Crowne Plaza hotel. Please visit the COGNA website www.cogna50usa.org to follow the annual seminar planning and other items of interest. To provide more information and updates on what each state is doing, this newsletter will also be sent to you. Should you have information that you would like to share with the other SNAs, please contact Sandy Farrell at cassandra.farrell@lva.virginia.gov.

T. Wayne Furr, Executive Secretary

COGNA 2018 in Tacoma

COGNA 2018 kicked off on Tuesday night, with attendees participating in a welcoming reception at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma. COGNA members had time to explore the award-winning museum before a light meal of appetizers and drinks. They were also given an overview of downtown Tacoma and the many attractions and restaurants nearby.

The next several days were busy as COGNA state representatives met for the annual business meeting. After Bruce Fisher of Oregon was elected to serve on the board, the meeting’s main discussion centered around where the 2019 conference was to be held and how state authorities around the nation were to be encouraged to attend. COGNA members present agreed to communicate with all SNAs through a twice-yearly newsletter in the hopes of encouraging SNAs that COGNA give them an opportunity to see the United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) in action and to witness the collaboration that exists between the USBGN and staff and the state authorities. Oregon has volunteered to host the 2020 meeting, and Missouri has offered to host during its bicentennial year, 2021.

After hearing state reports, representatives discussed features named or proposed to be named or changed. The Oregon board continues to address those features named with the derogatory term of “squaw,” and sixteen new names were approved because of the work of the Nez Perce and Umatilla tribes to agree to replacement names for features located on national forest lands. Also, Nevada’s representative Christine Johnson presented new challenges facing the Nevada Board on Geographic Names, including a new law requiring the board to post an audio of their meetings within 30 days to be ADA compliant. In Minnesota, one pending proposal called for renaming Lake Calhoun to Bole Maka Ska. Alaska reported that their geographic name board continues to receive proposals commemorating features or to rename others, and Hawaii actually lost a named feature destroyed by volcanic activity. When the Washington State Board on Geographic Names hosted one of its bi-annual meetings during the conference, attendees had the opportunity to watch how the Washington board makes naming decisions. The United States Board on Geographic Names held its June meeting in Tacoma where the Executive Secretary reports and BGN staff reports were read. Staff reported being interviewed by Wyoming Public Radio, Backpacker Magazine, and the Montana Guardian. These interviews concerned name proposals for features in the Yellowstone National Park. BGN staff reported that tribal interests in Maine had expressed an interest in changing the name of the St. John River in New Brunswick, Maine.
Several attendees read papers during the conference. Of particular interest was the presentation given by Jennifer Runyon and Lou Yost regarding the USBGN’s updated policies regarding tribal geographic names. Interested readers should peruse down to the article by Jennifer Runyon and Betsy Kanally in this newsletter for more information. Doug Vandegrift presented a very interesting discussion on the decision to change the name of Mt. McKinley to Denali. Other topics discussed included NOAA charts and the state of naming affairs in South Dakota.

The most popular session was the State and Federal Roundtable, a session where SNAs have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments to the USBGN. While BGN staff are not supposed to respond, they often do… Topics, questions and statements offered for discussion included the following:

1. When do names for populated places fall within geographic names purview?
2. How do the SNAs communicate with their respective state agencies?
3. How much evidence, and what kind of evidence, warrants a name change?
4. At what point will GIS retrievals be based on a polygon provided by the user?
5. At what point will multiple retrievals be saved and appended into one session?
6. Can selection capabilities for variant names be improved?
7. When will users be able to plot an entire retrieval list?
8. Do you find any aspects of your as an SNA to be confusing? Do you think that COGNA and BGN staff need to provide more guidance to new SNA’s?
9. Will proponents for name changes be able to submit a block of names in one proposal instead of having to submit a proposal for each?
10. It is recommended that the agenda for monthly USBGN meetings be made available to SNAs one week ahead of time.
11. SNAs should consider communicating with federal agencies within their state.
12. Is there a checklist of actions that an SNA should follow when reviewing and researching name proposal?
13. Google drive is a good tool to use to distribute case summaries and documents before a state name’s authority meeting.
14. Has your state considered meeting at least once a year near or at a geographic feature for which there is a name proposal? Then, host two comment periods and another one after the board makes a draft recommendation. Has your SNA considered outlining the public’s involvement process and creating a website to host information?
15. How does your state define community support? Is it the proponent’s responsibility to obtain community support?
16. How does your state handle Confederate place-names?
17. How does your SNA or your state government approach conflicts between English traditions of place-name spellings and those of Indigenous Americans/American Indians?
18. COGNA should explore posting business meetings and live presentations on their website.
19. A quarterly newsletter would be nice.
20. If the state reports read at COGNA were made available to all SNAs through COGNA’s website, by email, Google drive, etc., it might justify a state’s approving an SNA to attend the annual COGNA conference.
21. One SNA recommended that fellow SNAs read *Wisdom Sits in Places* by Keith Basso because it underscores the potential power of a name.
COGNA 2018 continued…

COGNA 2018 closed with keynote speaker Nile Thompson and a pasta dinner at the History Museum. Mr. Thompson spoke about pitfalls in attributing Native American names, the changes of those names over time, and the necessity of the Native American culture to use names that highlight their culture, past and present. His talk also drew on comments and observations made during the Native American Place Names panel earlier that afternoon. While some participants bade their COGNA colleagues farewell after the keynote banquet, others made preparations for the Toponymic Tour the following day.

Saturday’s Toponymic Tour began with cool weather in the morning. The group set out in two vans to explore the area around Tacoma’s Point Defiance Park and nearby Vashon Island. COGNA participants learned about the importance of the Wilkes Expedition and Vancouver’s explorations in Puget Sound place names. The group also heard about Vashon’s boat building past in places like Dockton and Lisa-beula, where during the first stop a bald eagle flew low overhead as if on cue. By far the highlight of the day was the tour of the Point Robinson Lighthouse with retired Coast Guard Captain Joe Wubbold. Captain Joe gave a great tour of the light, speaking at length about the history of Puget Sound navigation and his time in the Coast Guard. Imagine the group’s surprise when he told us that he himself had a glacier in Antarctica named after him! Then the sun came out, and the group made its way back to Tacoma via ferry. Once back on the mainland, the tour split to enjoy the Taste of Tacoma festival going on in the park or to have a leisurely dinner at Anthony’s, a waterfront seafood restaurant. On this high note, COGNA 2018 came to a close with folks bidding their colleagues adieu until next year.

Mary Paynton Schaff and Cassandra Britt Farrell

2020 in Oregon

The Oregon Geographic Names Board (OGNB) has offered to host the 2020 COGNA in Portland. The OGNB last hosted the conference, also held in Portland, in 2005. Over the past twenty years the OGNB has been the most active State Naming Authority in the country with over 200 names reaching approval by the US Board on Geographic Names. In existence since 1908, the OGNB is also the largest SNA with 25 volunteer board members. Recent naming activity includes processing proposals for 25 features located within the Newberry National Volcano Monument in central Oregon.

Bruce Fisher
CHANGES TO NATIVE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHIC NAMING PROTOCOL

The ways that the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) notifies federally recognized Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages about proposals is changing. These proposals include applications for new geographic names, changes to existing names, variant spellings, and other kinds of applications. One change is that the BGN now automatically accepts names submitted by Tribal Governments for geographic features located entirely on Tribal Trust Lands.

In 1996, the BGN established, with the Secretary of the Interior’s approval, a new policy entitled Names of Native American Origin. This policy was included in the 1997 edition of the BGN’s Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names (PPP) document. It stated, “Geographic names derived from the languages of Native Americans are an important and integral part of the cultural heritage of the United States….As part of its standard review procedure for proposed names, the BGN will consult with Federally recognized Tribes having an historic or cultural affiliation with the geographic location of the feature.”

Beginning in 2001, the staff forwarded a copy of each proposal to any federally recognized Tribe that might have an interest in that particular proposal. From the start, staff relied on available Tribal lands maps, including cessions maps published in the late nineteenth century. The Tribes were asked to respond by a specified date and advised that no response would be presumed as a lack of an opinion. As with all interested parties, the Tribes were given the option to indicate Support, No Objection, Disapproval, or No Opinion. Any Tribal responses that were received were shared with State Names Authorities, along with any local, State, and Federal agencies having an interest in the proposal, and were also noted in the monthly docket when the proposal was presented to the BGN for a decision.

In subsequent years, it was agreed that relying on small-scale historical maps to determine Tribal interest was insufficient. At the suggestion of the BGN’s member from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the BGN staff began to rely on the NAGPRA Native American Consultation Database, which allowed a query by State and County for all Tribes with an interest in a geographic location. It also provided a point of contact within the Tribal Government.

Over the years, it was observed that the Tribal response rate was extremely low, and concerns were expressed that Tribes with an interest were being omitted from the process (the NAGPRA database was established through “self-reporting”; that is, if a Tribe did not advise the maintenance agency that they had an interest in a specific county, they were excluded). In 2008, the BGN’s Domestic Names Committee established a Special Committee on Tribal Consultation, comprised of members, deputies, staff, and other interested individuals, to address whether a different approach might be needed. After much deliberation and research, a new draft interim Policy X: Tribal Geographic Names was developed. The policy was approved by the Secretary of the Interior and included in the updated PPP that was released in December 2016 (https://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/policies.htm).

The new policy states that in accordance with Executive Order 13175: Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments and with Department of the Interior policies, the BGN acknowledges the importance of Tribal sovereignty. The policy is considered ‘interim’ as long as further consultation is being offered.

In May 2018, a letter and two information papers were mailed to all 573 federally recognized Tribes. A follow-up email was sent to all Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) for which the BGN staff was able to acquire an email address. Contact information was obtained using the BIA’s Tribal Leaders Directory and the National Park Service’s THPO website.
Changes continued…

The letter informed the Tribes that upon request the BGN would provide consultation on the policy. It also stated that the BGN hopes the changes will increase awareness and participation in the area of geographic names by Tribal Governments.

The revised Policy X includes two significant changes.

New Tribal Communication Procedures

The first change involves how the BGN staff will share new proposals with Tribal Governments. Beginning July 1, 2018, with the release of Quarterly Review List 432 (https://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/quarterly_list.htm), the BGN staff will send an email each quarter to the 573 tribes and THPOs announcing the publication of the new list. Unlike before, when the BGN staff was expected to determine which Tribes might have any interest in a geographic area, the new procedure recognizes the authority of each Tribe to determine which proposals are within its area of interest. As such, a Tribal Government in any part of the country may choose to comment on any proposal. Just as before, any comments received from Tribes will be shared with State Names Authorities and with local, State, and Federal agencies having an interest in the proposal. If the Tribe submits a counter-proposal to the existing proposal, all parties, including the proponent, will be given an opportunity to review and comment on the matter.

The BGN recognizes that there are a number of State Names Authorities (SNAs) that receive, process, and vote on proposals before they are submitted to the BGN. In the course of its review, the SNA may request input from Tribes, whether through its Tribal liaison, State Indian Commission, or a similar entity. As such, comments from Tribes to SNAs may not come from the Tribal leader and/or THPO who would be contacted by the BGN staff following release of the quarterly review list. There are concerns that Tribal responses may differ if the input provided to an SNA is not coordinated with the Tribal leader and/or THPO. In an effort to address any inconsistencies, the BGN staff will note in the review list which Tribes were contacted by the SNA (and thus it is important that this information is included in the proposal packet sent to the BGN), and SNAs are asked to note in its communication with the Tribes that the BGN will also be contacting their Tribal Government and THPO, potentially several months later. In many ways, this scenario is no different than situations when employees of Federal or State agencies or local governments offer opinions to an SNA, or to the BGN, that have not been vetted by an authoritative government representative or by the BGN member representing that Federal agency.

Accepting Geographic Names from Tribal Governments

The second major change to Policy X, which further acknowledges Tribal sovereignty and the importance of Native names on Tribal Trust Lands, states that the BGN will automatically accept any geographic name or name change submitted by a Tribal Government for any geographic feature located entirely on its Tribal Trust Lands. In the past, these submissions were required to go through the normal BGN review process, but effective July 1, 2018, all such names will be automatically accepted upon submission. The names must be received from the Tribal Government leader or his/her delegated authority, and can be in any Native language, and, in accordance with Principle I, may use any character found in the Unicode Standard. They will not be review listed, nor will input be sought from local governments, State Names Authorities, or local, State, or Federal agencies.
Changes continued…

The names will be added directly into GNIS, which establishes them as official for Federal use. The only exceptions are if the name conflicts with one established by an Act of Congress, Executive or Secretarial Order, or Proclamation; if it conflicts with one established by a non-Tribal authority, such as a U.S. Post Office; it refers to a legally established place, such as a town, township, or city; or the name is derogatory or offensive.

If the BGN receives a proposal for a feature located entirely on Tribal Trust lands from anyone other than the Tribal Government, it will be referred to the appropriate Tribal authority. The BGN will not process the proposal, nor will it be review listed or voted on. State Names Authorities are requested to forward any such proposals to the BGN, which in turn will forward them to the Tribal Government.

If you have any questions about these changes, please contact Lou Yost, BGN Executive Secretary, at BGNEXEC@usgs.gov or (703) 648-4552, or Monique Fordham, BGN deputy member and USGS Tribal Liaison, at mfordham@usgs.gov or 703-648-4437.

Betsy Kannally and Jennifer Runyon

Note: For better or for worst—probably the latter—the content and layout is the work of Cassandra B. Farrell, SNA for Virginia.