



U.S. Board on Geographic Names

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey

Geographic Names Standardization not Regulation

- U.S. Board on Geographic Names
- Geographic Names Information System
 - National Geographic Names Data Compilation Program
 - Database Maintenance
 - System Redesign & Spatial Enabling



Standardization not Regulation

- **Why Standardize Geographic Names?**
 - National Security
 - Emergency Preparedness & Response
 - Regional & Local Planning
 - Site Selection & Analysis
 - Cartographic Application
 - Environmental Problem-solving
 - All Levels of Communication
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Standardization not Regulation

- All of which are key elements in support of a nation's spatial data infrastructure (NSDI).
 - In fact, applied toponymy (geographic names) is identified as a key component or layer in the NSDI of the United States and other countries, and has been adopted as such by the United Nations.
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Need For Standardization Late Nineteenth Century

- Numerous scientific and exploration expeditions by the Federal Government
- Many agencies making maps and charts of the same area
- Resulted in confusion, lack of communication, and conflicting maps & documents



Development of a Solution

- January 1890 – problem identified & appropriate action taken
- June 1890 – committee established & first meeting
- 4 September 1890 – U.S. Board on Geographic Names established by executive order
- Adopted policies at first meeting
- 25 July 1947 – Board re-established by Public Law



U.S. Board on Geographic Names Mission

- “...Provide for uniformity in geographic nomenclature and orthography throughout the federal government.”



U.S Board on Geographic Names Mission

- “...Formulate principles, policies, and procedures to be followed with reference to both domestic and foreign geographic names;...”



U.S. Board on Geographic Names Mission

- “...Promulgate in the name of the board..., decisions with respect to geographic names and principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.”



Domestic Names Committee

Principles

Reflects the basic philosophy

- Roman Alphabet
- Local Usage
- Congress & Executive Order
- Other Authorities (Administrative)
- Only One Official Name



Domestic Names Committee

Policies

Provides Uniformity in the Decision Making Process



Domestic Names Committee

Policies

- Congress
- Name Changes
- Commemorative Names
- Wilderness Areas
- Derogatory Names



Domestic Names Committee

Policies

- Diacritical Marks
- Name Duplication
- Variant Names
- Long Names
- Native American



Domestic Names Committee

Policies

- Others
 - Water Rights
 - Alphabetizing & Sequencing
 - Not Official
 - Genitive Case
 - Territorial seas
 - Pronunciation



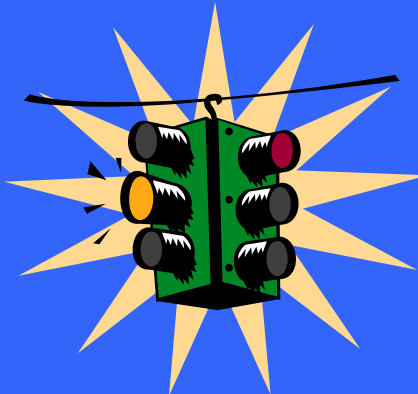
USBGN GNIS

- In 1987, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names Designated the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) as the Only Official Vehicle For Geographic Names Use By the Federal Government
 - Therefore, Federal Law Prescribes That GNIS Be Used As the Only Source for Applying Geographic Names to Federal Maps & Other Products
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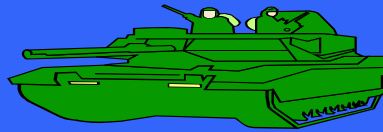


U.S. Board on Geographic Names

- No Federal Agency May CHANGE or ADD Unilaterally Any Name on Any Product For Any Reason Without BGN Approval – by Policy or Procedure
 - An Agency May Choose to Leave the Name Off a Map or Out of a Publication
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U.S. Board on Geographic Names Special Committee on Enforcement



U.S. Board on Geographic Names

- **Actually, This Is Serious Business**
- **At the Least – embarrassment to individuals and the agency**
- **At the most – serious ramifications to the public and all concerned**
- **Everything in between**



Automation

- **ALL FEATURES GREAT AND SMALL**

- **THE PERFECT VEHICLE FOR PROMULGATION AND PROMOTING THE PROCESS OF STANDARDIZATION**



GNIS Phase I & IA

- **Generally, all named features on the most current, large scale maps and charts of the Federal government**
 - U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps
 - U.S. Forest Service base maps & visitor maps
 - National Ocean Service charts (all scales)
 - National Park Service maps



GNIS Phase II

- Available information from official State and local sources, other approved sources, and historical maps and documents
 - Includes ALL categories except roads and highways
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GNIS Data Compilation Status Map



GNIS Phase III

- States compiled earlier in the program by GNIS staff as a prototype and for methodology testing were inadequate from the standpoint of time allowed, and therefore, sources used
- Early contractors had to compile from Federal sources, develop their own software, and had less time and funding – we were learning from experience



GNIS Phase III Compilation

- A national contract in two parts (probably east of the Mississippi River and west of the Mississippi River) to bring all information for each State to an equitable level of quality and quantity



GNIS Purposes

- **To Provide:**
 - Automated database and data management tools supporting Geographic Names Office
 - Data in support of map production to the National Mapping Program (USGS & USFS) as well as all other Federal Mapping Agencies
 - Public research tool for geographic place, feature, and area names and their locations



GNIS Purposes

- Data to other internal and external systems
 - Gateway to the Earth
 - TerraServer
 - National Atlas
 - LandView
 - GEO-Data Explorer
 - Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) Composite Gazetteer
 - Etc.



Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)

- Official Source for Domestic Geographic Names for the Federal Government
- Electronic Maintenance Program Since 1987
 - U.S. Board on Geographic Names
 - U.S. Geological Survey
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - Office of Coast Survey
 - National Park Service
 - Bureau of Land Management



Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)

- Maintenance by States
 - Florida
 - Delaware



Website

- <http://geonames.usgs.gov/>
- Approximately 20,000 accesses per day or more than 500,000 per month
- Approximately 100 gazetteers downloaded per day



GNIS Redesign & Spatial Enabling

- Redesign – a three year project now complete and in the testing phase
 - More efficient data maintenance and search capability
 - Spatially enabled

