

Geographic Name Change Process and Communications Plan

Statewide Mapping Advisory Committee

NC Board on Geographic Names

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I. Background

The North Carolina Board on Geographic Names (NC BGN) is a committee of the Statewide Mapping Advisory Committee (SMAC) and operates under the authority of the North Carolina Geographic Information Coordinating Council (GICC).

The US Board on Geographic Names (US BGN), in cooperation with the US Geological Survey (USGS), developed the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) which holds the Federally recognized name of each feature in the United States and defines the location of the feature by state, county, USGS topographic map, and geographic coordinates. The US BGN works with local communities and the NC BGN to develop official names that are required-use on federal products and are adopted by other non-federal organizations for use in mapping projects and records. The GNIS is a searchable database and is acknowledged by the GICC as the official North Carolina names repository.

II. Name Change Process for Unnamed Features or Existing Geographic Names

Government agencies, other organizations, and private citizens may submit a petition to the US BGN to change the name of a geographic feature, or to name an unnamed feature in North Carolina. To request a name change, go to the US BGN Domestic Geographic Name Proposal (DGNP) [website](#). The US BGN is guided by the document titled "[Principles, Policies, and Procedures for Domestic Geographic Names.](#)"

When a name change petition has been submitted to the US BGN, the US BGN should inform the NC BGN of the submittal, and if needed, ask the NC BGN to assist in seeking input from appropriate local and state government agencies. If the US BGN seeks input on its own, it should keep the NC BGN apprised. The NC BGN will continually communicate with the NC Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (CGIA) designee during this process. If the US BGN requests information about a geographic name from a SMAC member individually, the member has a responsibility to consult with the NC BGN and the CGIA designee as part of the process.

III. Name Change Process for Offensive, Derogatory or Insulting Geographic Names

- a) Any individual or agency may apply to the US BGN to propose changing a currently used place-name on grounds the name is offensive, derogatory or insulting to the state's people, history, and heritage ([US BGN Principles, Policies and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names](#), p. 21). This is done at the US BGN Domestic Geographic Name Proposal (DGNP) [website](#). Also, North Carolina legislation may direct the GICC to recommend a name change of a specific geographic feature or a specific name that would change the normal procedure for proposing a name change. For example, in Session Law 2003-211, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the Secretary of State and the GICC to develop a procedure for changing a certain offensive name for geographic features in North Carolina. That directive was carried out in cooperation with local governments, and the offensive name no longer appears on official geographic names in the GNIS. Likewise, a directive from the General Assembly in [Session Law 2013-328](#) for the GICC to recommend a name change to the US BGN was carried out. In the event of a new directive to the GICC regarding an offensive, derogatory or insulting name, the

GICC maintains the procedures developed as directed in 2003 as in the following parts b-g. As for any name change petition submitted to the US BGN, the US BGN should inform the NC BGN of the submittal, and if needed, ask the NC BGN to assist in seeking input from appropriate local and state government agencies. If the US BGN seeks input on its own, it should keep the NC BGN apprised. The NC BGN will continually communicate with the CGIA designee during this process.

- b) In the event of a State of North Carolina directive to change an offensive, derogatory or insulting name, the GICC, SMAC, and NC BGN will act as directed to prepare a request and recommendation to the US BGN. Work by the GICC, SMAC and NC BGN may involve any or all of three elements:
 - 1. The GICC will contact (as outlined in Session Law 2003-211), in writing, the county governing body in which the purported geographic name is located in order to:
 - a. notify the county that such application has been made,
 - b. ascertain the county governing body's position, if any, on the place-name in question,
 - c. inform the county governing body of the opportunity to be heard.
 - 2. After conducting its investigation and fact-finding, the NC BGN will report its findings to the SMAC, which will review the NC BGN's findings regarding the application.
 - 3. After reviewing the NC BGN's report, the SMAC will make a recommendation to the GICC regarding whether an application by the GICC to the US BGN to change the subject name is appropriate, including in the recommendation whether or not the name is offensive, derogatory or insulting to the State's people, history or heritage. The SMAC, through the NC BGN, may seek input from the county governing body, in writing, if it deems such input helpful or clarifying.
- c) The GICC will review the recommendation of the SMAC. If the GICC finds that the subject geographic name is offensive, derogatory or insulting, then it will notify, in writing, the governing body of the county where the offensive, derogatory or insulting name exists stating that the GICC intends to make application to the US BGN to change the name and will request that the county governing body suggest a replacement name.
- d) The county's governing body will have no less than 90 days from receipt of the notification from the GICC in which to respond. The GICC will not take action to affect the change of the offensive, derogatory or insulting name before it has reviewed the county's response or expiration of the 90-day period, whichever is sooner.
- e) The GICC will consider the response of the county governing body, if made within the appropriate time limit, and will consider resolutions, if any, passed by the county's governing body regarding the change of the subject name.
- f) If the county's recommended replacement name is not deemed to be offensive, derogatory or insulting by vote of the GICC, then the GICC will direct the SMAC and the NC BGN to make application to the US BGN to change the offensive geographic name to the name provided by the county governing body. If the county governing body fails to provide a replacement name within the specified time, or the provided name is deemed to be offensive, derogatory or insulting by vote of the GICC,

then the GICC will make the application to change the offensive name to a name chosen within its discretion.

- g) After consideration of all properly submitted documentation, if the GICC determines by a vote that application to the US BGN to change the name is appropriate, then it will direct the SMAC and the NC BGN to apply to the US BGN to change the offensive name.

The US BGN will follow its procedures on the GICC petition. Upon a decision, the US BGN will formally notify the GICC through the CGIA Director, the NC BGN and the governing body of the county of that change. within thirty (30) days.

IV. Commemorative Names

A commemorative name is the naming of a geographic feature after an individual. Naming geographic features after individuals is one way to signify that their lives and contributions were important to the location.

The US BGN policy on naming geographic features in commemoration of individuals is stated in Policy III of the US BGN document "[Principles, Policies, and Procedures for Domestic Geographic Names.](#)" In summary, the commemorative naming policy states:

- a) The individual being commemorated must be deceased at least five years.
- b) The person should have had some direct association with the geographic feature. An individual with an outstanding national (or international) reputation will be considered even if that person is not directly associated with the feature.
- c) The commemorative name proposal must meet the same US BGN criteria required of any other name proposal.

V. Name Changes in Geospatial Data and Products

Approval of a name change by US BGN and inclusion in the GNIS does not ensure that name changes will be incorporated in databases and map products (either hardcopy or digital) managed and used by GIS professionals and other stakeholders throughout North Carolina. In addition, hardcopy maps with old feature names may exist for prolonged periods of time. The result may be the dissemination of erroneous data and old maps, and the production of new maps containing superseded names.

The SMAC and NC BGN, with staff support from CGIA, will implement a communications plan to disseminate geographic feature name changes as widely as possible.

VI. Communications Plan

The US BGN, NC BGN, SMAC and CGIA staff will collaborate on the following tasks for all feature name changes in North Carolina.

- a) US BGN. Inform NC BGN, SMAC, and CGIA staff of name change proposals, status, and needs for information from and consideration by North Carolina.
- b) NC BGN. Submit a written quarterly report to the SMAC, the CGIA Director, and the CGIA designee on all actions by the NC BGN and US BGN related to North Carolina features.

- c) CGIA. Maintain a list of feature name changes and maps that display the changes on the NC BGN website. This will be done for all previous name changes in addition to the ones for the current quarter.
- d) SMAC. Communicate the process to the standing committees of the GICC.
- e) CGIA (on behalf of the NC BGN and the SMAC). If any name changes are adopted by the US BGN during the quarter, a summary will be sent at the conclusion of the quarter, via listservs and email distribution lists, to the organizations listed below. The announcement will include a link to the online list and a reminder about the need to update datasets to incorporate name changes and a suggestion that the name changes be listed in their newsletters or other outreach material.
- f) If a name change for an offensive, derogatory or insulting name has been approved by the US BGN, a specific correspondence (through listservs and email distribution lists) will be sent to the organizations below as soon as practical after the approval. The correspondence will request that organizations search any databases or electronic entries they control to find instances of the offensive, derogatory or insulting name and replace with the US BGN-adopted name in a timely way.
 - a. NC State Government GIS Coordinators
 - b. NCGIS listserv
 - c. NC Property Mappers Association
 - d. Carolina URISA
 - e. NC ArcGIS Users Group
 - f. NC Chapter of the American Planning Association
 - g. NC Local Government Information Systems Association
 - h. State Government GIS Users Committee
 - i. Federal Interagency Committee
 - j. NC Association of County Commissioners
 - k. NC League of Municipalities
 - l. NC Society of Surveyors