Foreign Names (continued)

non-Roman script names associated with some of the Romanized forms.

Each geographic feature found in the GNS will have associated geographic names in one or more of the categories described above. If a user requires a single name for a geographic feature that has more than one of these categories, the suggested order of precedence is:

1) Conventional
2) Approved
3) Provisional
4) Unverified
5) Anglicized
6) Variant

The GNS search results are sorted by precedence.

Although a key principle of the BGN is to approve only one name for a feature (conventional names excepted), the BGN may approve more than one name for:

- international features (except high-seas features);
- features within a single country where more than one language is considered official.

In some circumstances, the BGN will approve both long and short form names for a feature. Usually the short form name is approved for convenience of the user, and involves either removing the descriptive part of a name (e.g., Kingdom of Bahrain [long form]; Bahrain [short form]) or shortening an official name to a form more commonly used (e.g., Heroica Veracruz [long form]; Veracruz [short form]).

There are also situations in which more than one approved name exists within the same precedence category (e.g., two approved short forms).

In cases where more than one name is approved, the user should select the approved name that best fits the context of the user's publication, report, map, or database entry.

BGN Contact Information

Questions relating to the correct use of geographic names should be directed to the BGN Secretariat at the contact points listed below.

Domestic and Antarctic Geographic Names

For domestic geographic names and Antarctic toponymy, please contact:

Mr. Lou Yost
Executive Secretary, Domestic Names
U.S. Geological Survey
523 National Center
Reston, Virginia 20192-0523

Phone: 703-648-4552
Email: lyost@usgs.gov

Foreign and Undersea Geographic Names

For foreign geographic names and the names of undersea features, please contact:

Mr. Marcus Allsup
Acting Executive Secretary, Foreign Names
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
7500 GEOINT Drive, Mail Stop N62
Springfield, Virginia 22150-7500

Phone: 571-557-6225
Email: marcus.w.allsup@nga.mil

Useful Tips for Applying Official Geographic Names in Federal Publications

PROVIDING OFFICIAL GEOGRAPHIC NAMES FOR OVER A CENTURY

(Information current as of March 2015)

Standardizing Placenames

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) is the interagency organization authorized by the U.S. Congress to maintain uniform geographic name usage throughout the Federal Government. It provides the official placenames required by law for use in Federal Government publications, including maps, web sites, and documents.

Standardized spelling and use of geographic names allows the Federal Government to communicate clearly and unambiguously about places, reducing the potential for confusion. This was the original reason for the establishment of the BGN in 1890: to sort out the confusion caused by maps of frontier lands that applied different names to the same feature.

Geographic names also carry great cultural significance. Using one name in preference to another can even have political implications. For this reason, foreign geographic names, in particular, are carefully considered and reflect the official policy of the U.S. government.

As an example, the Federal Government does not currently use the locally official name "Myanmar" for the country of Burma. The name Myanmar was imposed by the ruling military junta of Burma in the 1990s, ignoring the results of civil elections. Although Myanmar is recorded as a variant name, Burma remains the BGN official name of the country.

Domestic Names

There are two types of names for geographic features in the United States, its territories, and outlying areas: official names and variants. For domestic names, there is only one approved official name. A variant name is a name or spelling other than the official name that has been found in any source, published or verbal. A place may have multiple variant names.

For example, Annapolis, the capital of Maryland, has also been known as Arundelton. Annapolis is the only official name approved for use in Federal publications, while Arundelton is one of several variant names.

For some entities, a shortened version of the official name may be used. For example, the State of Wisconsin may be referred to as Wisconsin, and the City of Atlanta may be referred to as Atlanta.

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the source of official and variant names for domestic features.

http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/

Users can query all domestic names using the GNIS. The result that is returned is the official name, whether the official name or variant name is entered. If the user enters Annapolis or Arundelton, the official name Annapolis is returned. The results will include not only the official name, but a list of any known variant names. Variant names may not be used without reference to the official name.

Public Law 80-242 Requires the Use of BGN-Approved Geographic Names on All Federal Publications

Foreign Names

Determining the official names of features in foreign areas can be complicated. A feature may be located in multiple countries with different languages or names for the feature, or may be located in a single country with multiple languages.

For instance, the Danube River, which flows through or borders ten countries, has seven names with different spellings which are approved for use.

Geographic names for foreign areas are found in the GEOnet Names Server (GNS) at

http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/

In the GNS, foreign geographic names are categorized as:

(C) Conventional: a common English-language name for a feature, approved by the BGN for use in addition to, or in lieu of, a BGN-approved local official name or in an area where English is not the official language. Example: Rome (the capital of Italy).

(N) Approved: the BGN-approved local official name for a geographic feature. Example: Roma (the capital of Italy).

(P) Provisional: a geographic name of a feature for which the territorial status is not finally determined or not recognized by the United States.

(D) Unverified: a feature name derived from a source whose official status cannot be verified by the BGN.

(V) Variant: a former name, a name other than the official name that is found to be in local use, or any other name or spelling found on various sources.

(VA) Anglicized: a special class of Variant name representing an English-language form of an approved local name.

Geographic names in non-Roman script are Romanized according to policies implemented by the BGN. The GNS also contains