The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) is responsible by law for standardizing geographic names for use by the departments and agencies of the Federal Government. Domestic names are handled by the Domestic Names Committee, which is comprised of members from the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense, the Government Publishing Office, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Interior, the Library of Congress, and the U.S. Postal Service.

One of the primary responsibilities of the BGN is to evaluate proposals submitted by local, State, Federal, and Tribal agencies, other organizations, and the general public to apply a new name to a natural geographic feature or to change an existing name, spelling, or application. The BGN does this by determining use and/or acceptance of the proposed name.

- To determine local use and/or support, BGN staff solicits input from the elected governments of any cities, townships, and counties in which a feature is located. The BGN doesn’t have the resources to contact every local landowner who may have an interest in a proposal. The elected governments can arrive at their opinion however they like — a public hearing, a vote by the board of commissioners, asking local landowners, etc. They speak for the citizens whom they represent.
- If the feature is on Federally managed land, the BGN solicit input from the appropriate Federal agency. The BGN member who represents the agency provides the final official opinion to the BGN. The agencies most commonly contacted are the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Office of Coast Survey/NOAA, and the Department of Defense.
- BGN staff solicits input from federally recognized Tribes by informing them when a new Quarterly Review List is made available on the BGN website.
- The BGN solicits input from the State Names Authority (SNA). The SNA is expected to consider the opinions of local, Federal, and tribal agencies and other interested parties when formulating its recommendation.


The role of the State Names Authority (SNA) is to provide a recommendation to the BGN after reviewing and evaluating input from interested parties. The SNAs have different processes and procedures, and as such, provide their recommendations in various ways. Some SNAs comprise large boards, with legislative appointments, while others are small committees, or in many states, just one person. Some SNAs handle some or all of the local and tribal outreach. All SNAs are encouraged to solicit input from any State agency that might have an interest in the proposal (conservation, natural resource, parks, highway departments; land management agencies, etc.). Many SNAs work closely with State historical societies, map archives, and libraries, which may have access to more documents and records than BGN staff can find in their research.
The proposal review process consists of several steps:

- A proponent submits a proposal for a name, or in some cases, proposals for several names. These proposals are most commonly to apply a new name, to make official a name already in local use but not listed in GNIS (https://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/), or to change an existing name, spelling, or application. At present, there is no limit as to how many proposals a single proponent can submit.
- The proposal is acknowledged by BGN staff. Any immediate issues are addressed (adherence to policies (https://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/policies.html), verification of feature location, need for additional biographical details, etc.), and next steps are outlined. SNA, and if appropriate, Federal land management agency, is copied.
- BGN staff begins to process the proposal. First, we confirm the feature description is accurate and that the feature is unnamed in GNIS (or if named, the history of the existing name).
- BGN staff prepares a case summary to be added to the next Quarterly Review List (https://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/quarterly_list.htm).
- BGN staff begins to contact interested parties for input. Staff typically emails the local elected governments. The requests include a copy of the original proposal, a case summary, map(s), and a recommendation form to be returned to the BGN staff. If no initial response is received, a second request is sent with a deadline for response; after the deadline has passed, it is presumed that the government has no opinion on the matter.
- The SNA is informed of the pending proposals and all responses are forwarded for their records. The SNA recommendation should be made after the local responses are known (and ideally after any relevant Federal or Tribal responses are known).
- If the feature is on Federally managed land, BGN staff asks for the recommendation of the land management agency (US Forest Service, National Park Service, etc.).
- In accordance with Federal policies on Tribal consultation, BGN staff also advises all federally recognized Tribes that the new Quarterly Review List is posted at the BGN website and invites any Tribe with an interest to provide input. [This is a new policy; until June 2018, proposals were forwarded to specific Tribes that had an interest in a county, per the NAGPRA Native American Consultation Database. A deadline was provided, with a statement that they can request more time for review; otherwise, the BGN assumes the Tribe has no opinion.]
- If, at any time prior to the BGN vote, a counter-proposal is submitted by any party, the entire process starts over. That is, the BGN staff will ask the original proponent and all interested parties to comment on the new proposal. The BGN will evaluate any and all counter-proposals concurrently.
- The SNA is asked for a final recommendation to the BGN
- After all responses are received, the BGN staff presents the proposal and a summary of all input to the BGN at its next monthly meeting.
- Approved names are entered into GNIS and are considered official for Federal use.
- All parties who commented on the proposal are notified of the BGN's decision.
- The entire process takes several months. Many proposals are voted on by the BGN between 6 to 10 months after they are received, while others can take well over a year.