

Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names

June 2023 Public Comment

The Native American Rights Funds' Statement of Support and Recommendations for Action

Introduction

The Native American Rights Fund (“NARF”) thanks the members of the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names (ACRPN) for addressing the important issue of renaming racist and derogatory place names on public lands. NARF has long supported legislative and other actions to remove derogatory names, as these names are an embarrassing and harmful legacy of this country’s colonialist and racist past.¹

Renaming derogatory and racist geographic feature and land units allows for a more honest telling of America’s history and healing for the native people. Aside from enshrining hurtful ideas and memories, these names perpetuate prejudice and racism and create an unwelcoming environment for many people on America’s public lands.² We share the Committee’s commitment to making our lands more inclusive and respectful of Native peoples. Native Americans have called for changing place names at national parks and monuments for more than a century.³ Indeed, the use of slurs such as squaw both perpetuate and allow for violence against native women, which is an ongoing crisis in the U.S.⁴

NARF recommends that the Committee include commemorative and administrative names within the scope of the Committee’s work. We also have identified some derogatory place names that the Committee should address through consultation with interested Tribal Nations. Finally, structural changes in the renaming process and greater public notice for ACRPN meetings are needed.

Comments

1. Commemorative Names

The definition of “derogatory” for the purpose of the Committee’s work should be written to include places named after individuals who caused harm and perpetrated violence against Indigenous Peoples and others. Continuing to use the names of these individuals reminds indigenous peoples of the acts of violence against their communities, perpetuates colonialist

¹ *It is Time to Move Past Derogatory Place Names*, Native American Rights Fund (Nov. 19, 2021), <https://narf.org/derogatory-place-names/>.

² NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICERS & THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY, A GUIDE TO CHANGING RACIST AND OFFENSIVE PLACE NAMES IN THE UNITED STATES 3 (2022), https://www.nathpo.org/assets/pdf/Place_Names_Guide/.

³ *Offensive Names Should Be Removed from Public Lands*, Scientific American (April 22, 2022), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/offensive-names-should-be-removed-from-public-lands/>

⁴ A Proclamation on Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/05/04/a-proclamation-on-missing-or-murdered-indigenous-persons-awareness-day-2023/>

ideals and the “disappearing Indian” myth, and makes these locations unwelcoming to many.⁵ While some critiques have argued that renaming these geographical locations and federal land units amounts to “cancelling history,” these actions actually provide a more honest telling of American History and acknowledge the native people of these lands that have held many of these locations sacred long before the arrival of Europeans.

NARF recommends that the Committee intimately work with interested Tribal Nations to rename places named after individuals that harmed and perpetrated violence against Native Americans. The Committee should consider replacing these commemorative names with those of individuals who have been previously excluded from the historical narrative or returning to Indigenous names for these places to heal these historic wrongs and more accurately portray American history.

The following contains a non-exhaustive list of locations with commemorative names that NARF recommends should be renamed:

- **Mount Evans, Colorado**—named after John Evans, territorial governor of Colorado and facilitator of the Sand Creek Massacre, which killed over 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho members, mostly women, children, and elders.⁶
- **Hayden Valley, Yellowstone National Park** – named after Ferdinand Hayden, who advocated for assimilation and alternatively the extermination of Native People.⁷
- **Hillman Peak, Crater Lake National Park** –named after John Wesley Hillman, who fought in the Rogue River Wars against the Native American tribes of the Rogue River Valley area of what today is southern Oregon.⁸
- **Mt. Scott and Scott Bluffs, Crater Lake National Park** –named after Levi Scott, U.S. Captain in the Cayuse War, which resulted in the death of many Cayuse people and their removal to reservations.⁹
- **Hudson Bay Creek, Glacier National Park** –named after Henry Hudson, responsible for the demise of an indigenous settlement in Nova Scotia in 1609.¹⁰
- **Gardeners Hole, Yellowstone National Park** – named after a fur trapper who scalped and burned alive three Arikara men that he accused of killing three trappers.¹¹
- **Mt. Sheridan, Yellowstone National Park** –named after General Philip H. Sheridan, who he killed Indigenous people and promoted exterminating the buffalo during the Indian Wars.¹²

⁵ NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICERS & THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY, A GUIDE TO CHANGING RACIST AND OFFENSIVE PLACE NAMES IN THE UNITED STATES 3 (2022), https://www.nathpo.org/assets/pdf/Place_Names_Guide/; Bonnie M, McGill et al., *Words are monuments: Patterns in US national park place names perpetuate settler colonial mythologies including white supremacy*, 4 PEOPLE AND NATURE 683, 689 (June 2022).

⁶ Elaine Tassy, *The Mount Evans renaming process picked up speed this week with a surprising vote*, COLORADO PUBLIC RADIO (Nov. 18, 2022), <https://www.cpr.org/2022/11/18/board-recommends-renaming-mount-evans/>.

⁷ *Map*, WORDS ARE MONUMENTS, <https://wordsaremonuments.org/> (last visited June 13, 2023).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

- **Cardenas Butte, Grand Canyon National Park** –named after Don Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, “the only member of the Coronado expedition to be punished back in Spain for his cruelties to and murdering of numerous Native Americans.”¹³
- **NORDENSKÖLD SITE #16 (Ancestral Puebloan site), Mesa Verde National Park** – named after archaeologist responsible for stealing artifacts and destroying culturally significant sites.¹⁴
- **Kit Carson Mountain, Colorado** – named after 19th century frontiersman who “put down a wartime Navajo uprising by ordering the destruction of crops and villages belonging to Navajo Indians” and led the forceful removal of the Navajo to a reservation that killed approximately 300 Navajo tribe members.¹⁵

This list is by no means comprehensive, and there are already some active efforts to change the name of some of these locations, like Mount Evans and Kit Carson Mountain. The Committee should ignite or support efforts to change the names of these locations and consult with interested Tribal Nations on these efforts.

2. Derogatory names

The Committee should recommend that places with names that include the terms Red Skin/ Redskin, Savage, Chinaman, Injun, Dead Indian, Bitch, Negro, Coon, and Uncle Tom be replaced. We have included a list some places that the Committee should recommend for renaming because they are disparaging to indigenous communities:

- **Dead Indian Creek Diversion, Bureau of Reclamation Land, Oregon**
- **Dead Indian Soda Springs, U.S. Forest Service Land, Oregon**
- **Redskin Brook, Indiana (stream)**
- **Redskin Creek, Colorado (stream)**
- **Redskin Gulch, Colorado (valley)**
- **Redskin Hammock, Florida (island)**
- **Redskin Mountain, Colorado**
- **Big Injun Lake, Wisconsin**
- **Dead Injun Creek, Oregon**
- **Injun Creek, California**
- **Injun Creek, Montana**

Through the Geographic Names Information System database, we have also identified 42 geographic names including the term “Dead Indian” and 147 geographic names including the term “Savage” with seven different locations named “Savage Point” and at least five summits named “Savage Mountain.” The Commission should work with interested tribes to appropriately rename these locations.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Some Colo. Neighbors want Kit Carson Mountain renamed*, DENVER POST (Nov. 20, 2010), <https://www.denverpost.com/2010/11/20/some-colo-neighbors-want-kit-carson-mountain-renamed/>.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider our recommendations. We look forward to further supporting and engaging with the Commission in their efforts to rename derogatory geographic features and federal land units.