

## Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names

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July 29, 2024

Secretary

U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

On behalf of the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names, I am pleased to forward to you for your consideration, a robust set of recommendations that were developed by the Committee and approved at our fourth meeting that was held in Rapid City, South Dakota on June 10-11, 2024.

Building upon the important work and engagement that came out of our last meeting in Hawai'i in November 2023, each of our four subcommittees worked diligently to continue to research and discuss potentially derogatory and harmful names that exist on the landscape. Subcommittee members invited guest speakers to share their perspectives on the history and use of derogatory names against specific communities. These names have a dehumanizing effect and have caused intergenerational harm to impacted and marginalized groups.

Committee members also recognized the importance of educating and engaging with impacted communities and the larger public to help them understand and navigate the renaming process. Discussions around improvements to the current process, managed by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, resulted in actionable recommendations, many of which can be easily implemented with little or no cost to the Federal Government.

While in Rapid City, the Committee invited several Tribal members to share their knowledge and experiences with the legacy of derogatory names that perpetuate prejudice and racism and erase native culture and history. One example was cited again and again by Tribal speakers and members of the public – the renaming of Mato Tipila, a sacred site in Wyoming, to Devils Tower in 1875.

Over 20 Tribes with an association to the area have coalesced around the traditional and long-standing name, Bear Lodge, to replace the harmful term Devils Tower for this sacred site. Bear Lodge is found on maps dating back to the 1800s, and has been in use for even longer by Indigenous people in the area. In honor of the sovereign nations who have worked tirelessly for almost a century to remove this harmful name, we respectfully ask you to use your authority as Secretary to give the mountain back its name and start the healing process.

Enclosed are several sets of recommendations in support of the charge you have given us. We look forward to continuing this important work to reverse a legacy of harm bestowed upon our lands by derogatory and offensive names, and to empower impacted communities to be the agents of change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard D. Valandra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H' and 'V'.

Howard Valandra, Chair

**Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names  
June 10-11, 2024, Meeting in Rapid City, South Dakota**

**Summary of Recommendations**

- Appendix A: The Committee approved the working definition of “derogatory” that was developed by the Committee to help shape its work and evaluate potentially derogatory geographic feature and Federal land unit names.
- Appendix B: For almost a century, Tribes have advocated to return the Indigenous name “Bear Lodge” to the sacred feature in Wyoming that was given the offensive and harmful name “Devils Tower” in the last 1800s. The Committee recommends that you use your authority under 43 U.S.C. 364b to rename both the geographic feature and associated unincorporated populated place from Devils Tower to Bear Lodge, a change supported by over 20 Tribes with an association to the area. In addition, we recommend you petition the President to also change the name Devils Tower National Monument (the first national monument established under the Antiquities Act of 1906) to Bear Lodge National Monument.
- Appendix C: Based upon the agreed upon definition of derogatory, the Committee offers five additional terms (and 143 feature names associated with those terms) that are potentially derogatory and require additional engagement and input.
- Appendix D: The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) is responsible for managing the process for naming geographic features. The Committee developed nine recommendations to improve the naming proposal process. If implemented, these recommendations would increase transparency and public understanding of the process, while also promoting returning Native names to geographic features.
- Appendix E: Education and outreach are key components to improving the naming process and removing derogatory names that cause intergenerational harm. Most people are not aware of the role of the USBGN and opportunities for any individual to propose a new name to replace a derogatory name on the landscape. The Committee developed 16 recommendations around education and engagement, partnerships, and resources. If implemented, these recommendations would help educate the public and communities on how the renaming process works, better explain the impacts of derogatory names on affected communities, support developing educational materials on how to discuss sensitive issues related to derogatory names, and how to build upon current efforts to achieve success through partnerships.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Working Definition of Derogatory**

A derogatory place name is any term attached to the national landscape, its places and geographic features that a) is used or intended as a disrespectful, belittling, hurtful, or disparaging slur, b) pejoratively labels any racial or ethnic group, gender, religious affiliation, sexual identity, or physical or mental condition, or c) uses insulting slang/linguistic derivatives to negatively stereotype certain social groups or identities. All of these forms of derogatory place names have a dehumanizing effect and have the impact of perpetuating longstanding structural inequalities and causing harm or exclusion.

The immediate charge of this Committee is to focus specifically on derogatory names. However, there are other types of place names that wound the psycho-social well-being and sense of belonging of historically marginalized communities, are unwelcoming to those communities, and do not honor the diversity and dignity of all of America's citizens. The Committee recognizes there is need for a multi-stage approach to addressing and reforming a wide array of problematic place names on the nation's landscape. Commemorative names exist which are considered harmful, disrespectful, and offensive to particular groups of people historically discriminated against which must be examined in the future. This process must include lengthy and transparent public dialogue with affected groups to address names that valorize and monumentalize historical events and figures with clear legacies associated with structural violence and oppression. It is believed that the American namescape must be a dynamic and responsive tapestry.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Renaming of Devils Tower to Bear Lodge**

For almost a century, Tribal leaders have sought to change the name of the sacred geographic feature in Wyoming known as “Devils Tower” to the Indigenous name “Bear Lodge.” More than 20 Tribes with close association to the site find the name “Devils Tower” to be offensive and support this renaming proposal.

The Secretary of the Interior has the authority, pursuant to 43 U.S.C. §364b, to rename a geographic feature if the U.S. Board on Geographic Names “does not act within a reasonable time.” Given that the proposal (1) was submitted nearly 10 years ago, but has not been acted upon, and (2) is supported by 20 sovereign Nations, it is time for the Secretary to take action to rename both the geographic feature and the associated unincorporated populated place to Bear Lodge. In addition, we recommend that the Department engage with the local community to develop an alternate name for the associated unincorporated populated place if Bear Lodge is not supported. Further, we recommend that the Secretary identify resources to help support local businesses with costs associated with any resulting name change. While the Secretary is encouraged to assist impacted businesses, the Committee believes the economic profits made from this harmful name as a place, or tourist brand, should not take priority over reconciliation.

The Committee also recommends that the Secretary submit a request to the President, acting under his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906, to change the name of the national monument to Bear Lodge National Monument. This builds off of the draft recommendation coming from the Federal Land Unit Names Subcommittee presented during the November 2023 public meeting.

## APPENDIX C

### Potentially Derogatory Terms and Geographic Feature Names

The Committee recommends that the following geographic feature names are potentially derogatory and require engagement and input from appropriate Tribal, State, and local governments, affected Federal agencies and departments, and local communities to make a determination on whether a replacement name is needed.

FEATURE NAME	CLASS	STATE
1. Nipper Corner	Populated Place	Illinois
2. Nipper Cove	Bay	Alaska
3. Nipper Creek	Stream	Alaska
4. Nipper Creek	Stream	South Carolina
5. Nipper Hollow	Valley	Missouri
6. Nipper Mountain	Summit	Arkansas
7. Rape Coulee	Valley	Montana
8. Rape Creek	Stream	Montana
9. Rape Gap	Gap	Georgia
10. Rape Lake	Reservoir	Georgia
11. Rape Saddle	Gap	Idaho
12. Faggot Hill	Summit	Massachusetts
13. East Fork Papoose Creek	Stream	California
14. East Papoose Lake	Lake	Alaska
15. Little Papoose Creek	Stream	California
16. Little Papoose Lake	Lake	Wisconsin
17. Little Papoose Pond	Lake	Maine
18. North Fork Papoose Creek	Stream	California
19. Papoose	Pillar	Colorado
20. Papoose	Summit	Montana
21. Papoose Arm	Bay	California
22. Papoose Basin	Basin	Colorado
23. Papoose Beach	Beach	Iowa
24. Papoose Bench	Bench	Utah
25. Papoose Branch	Stream	New Jersey
26. Papoose Canyon	Valley	Utah
27. Papoose Canyon	Valley	Utah
28. Papoose Canyon	Valley	Nevada
29. Papoose Coulee	Valley	Montana
30. Papoose Cove	Bay	Alaska
31. Papoose Creek	Stream	Wyoming
32. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
33. Papoose Creek	Stream	Oregon

<b>FEATURE NAME</b>	<b>CLASS</b>	<b>STATE</b>
34. Papoose Creek	Stream	Colorado
35. Papoose Creek	Stream	Missouri
36. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
37. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
38. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
39. Papoose Creek	Stream	Oregon
40. Papoose Creek	Stream	Montana
41. Papoose Creek	Stream	California
42. Papoose Creek	Stream	Utah
43. Papoose Creek	Stream	Oregon
44. Papoose Creek	Stream	Montana
45. Papoose Creek	Stream	Colorado
46. Papoose Creek	Stream	Montana
47. Papoose Creek	Stream	California
48. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
49. Papoose Creek	Stream	Iowa
50. Papoose Creek	Stream	Wyoming
51. Papoose Creek	Stream	California
52. Papoose Creek	Stream	Washington
53. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
54. Papoose Creek	Stream	Indiana
55. Papoose Creek	Stream	Wisconsin
56. Papoose Creek	Stream	Minnesota
57. Papoose Creek	Stream	Montana
58. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
59. Papoose Creek	Stream	California
60. Papoose Creek	Stream	Wisconsin
61. Papoose Creek	Stream	Idaho
62. Papoose Creek	Stream	Texas
63. Papoose Creek	Stream	Alaska
64. Papoose Creek	Stream	Colorado
65. Papoose Creek	Stream	Wisconsin
66. Papoose Creek	Stream	Montana
67. Papoose Ditch	Canal	Montana
68. Papoose Draw	Valley	Texas
69. Papoose Flat	Flat	California
70. Papoose Gulch	Valley	Montana
71. Papoose Gulch	Valley	California
72. Papoose Hill	Summit	California
73. Papoose Hill	Summit	Oklahoma

<b>FEATURE NAME</b>	<b>CLASS</b>	<b>STATE</b>
74. Papoose Hills	Summit	Montana
75. Papoose Island	Island	Idaho
76. Papoose Island	Island	Maine
77. Papoose Island	Island	New York
78. Papoose Lake	Lake	Minnesota
79. Papoose Lake	Lake	Oregon
80. Papoose Lake	Reservoir	California
81. Papoose Lake	Lake	Wisconsin
82. Papoose Lake	Lake	Michigan
83. Papoose Lake	Lake	Illinois
84. Papoose Lake	Reservoir	Utah
85. Papoose Lake	Lake	Minnesota
86. Papoose Lake	Lake	Idaho
87. Papoose Lake	Lake	Nevada
88. Papoose Lake	Lake	California
89. Papoose Lake	Lake	Wyoming
90. Papoose Lake	Lake	Michigan
91. Papoose Lake	Lake	Colorado
92. Papoose Lake	Lake	Oregon
93. Papoose Lake	Reservoir	Nevada
94. Papoose Lake	Lake	New York
95. Papoose Lake	Reservoir	New Jersey
96. Papoose Lake	Lake	Colorado
97. Papoose Lake	Flat	Oregon
98. Papoose Lake	Lake	Minnesota
99. Papoose Lake	Lake	Idaho
100. Papoose Lake	Lake	Wisconsin
101. Papoose Lake	Lake	Michigan
102. Papoose Lake	Lake	Idaho
103. Papoose Lake	Lake	Wisconsin
104. Papoose Lake	Lake	California
105. Papoose Lakes	Lake	Idaho
106. Papoose Lakes	Lake	Oregon
107. Papoose Ledge	Bench	Connecticut
108. Papoose Meadows	Flat	California
109. Papoose Mining District	Civil	Nevada
110. Papoose Mountain	Summit	Idaho
111. Papoose Mountain	Summit	Nevada
112. Papoose Mountain	Summit	Colorado
113. Papoose Peak	Summit	Colorado



<b>FEATURE NAME</b>	<b>CLASS</b>	<b>STATE</b>
114. Papoose Peak	Summit	Idaho
115. Papoose Peak	Summit	California
116. Papoose Pond	Lake	Maine
117. Papoose Pond	Lake	Maine
118. Papoose Range	Range	Nevada
119. Papoose Saddle	Gap	Idaho
120. Papoose Spring	Spring	Nevada
121. Papoose Spring	Spring	Utah
122. Papoose Twins	Lake	Alaska
123. Sacagawea and Papoose Rocks	Summit	Washington
124. South Fork Papoose Creek	Stream	California
125. West Papoose Lake	Lake	Alaska
126. Peckerwood Branch	Stream	North Carolina
127. Peckerwood Branch	Stream	Virginia
128. Peckerwood Branch	Stream	Virginia
129. Peckerwood Branch	Stream	Tennessee
130. Peckerwood Creek	Stream	North Carolina
131. Peckerwood Creek	Stream	Alabama
132. Peckerwood Hill	Summit	Oklahoma
133. Peckerwood Hill	Summit	Texas
134. Peckerwood Hollow	Valley	Ohio
135. Peckerwood Hollow	Valley	Missouri
136. Peckerwood Hollow	Valley	Tennessee
137. Peckerwood Lake	Reservoir	Illinois
138. Peckerwood Lake	Reservoir	Arkansas
139. Peckerwood Level	Populated Place	Virginia
140. Peckerwood Point	Populated Place	Tennessee
141. Peckerwood Ridge	Ridge	Tennessee
142. Peckerwood Ridge	Ridge	North Carolina
143. Peckerwood Shoals (historical)	Bar	Alabama

## APPENDIX D

### Improvements to the Naming Proposal Process U.S. Board on Geographic Names

#### General Process:

1. Whereas commemorative and other names being considered by Congress can run counter to the regulations and policies of the USBGN,

**It is recommended that the ability to place a name on the Nation's landscape be reserved or limited to the United States Board on Geographic Names as intended by the original executive action of 1890 [Executive Order 28].**

#### For U.S. Board on Geographic Names:

1. Whereas eradicating derogatory or offensive place names from the Nation's landscape should be given higher priority than other name change proposals and;

Whereas the harm to historically marginalized citizens is perpetuated in the use of derogatory names and that this harm is real, ongoing, often under-discussed, and thus more urgent than other matters of geographic naming,

**It is recommended that the USBGN create a transparent framework for prioritizing the response of staff and the Board in evaluating, researching, and acting upon renaming proposals, with a higher priority placed on public requests to address derogatory or offensive place names versus those deemed by staff as requiring less immediate or urgent action, noting less important applications may be deferred for an unknown period of time (years).**

2. Whereas the timeline for issuing decisions on proposals before the Board regarding derogatory or offensive names may be considered unacceptably long, and inadequate staffing is a major contributing factor to these delays,

**It is recommended that additional research and administration staff be hired by the U.S. Geological Survey for the USBGN to perform additional outreach and research on applications received and to support enhanced focus on derogatory place name elimination and mitigation. Further, it is recommended that the USBGN policies be updated to define a reasonable timeframe of 5 years or less for USBGN action on proposals to remedy derogatory or offensive place names, after which time it would be forwarded to the Secretary for executive action.**

3. Whereas most Native languages and their systems of naming are endangered cultural resources which carry important historical and ecological information as well as holding deep cultural and spiritual significance to Tribal communities, and have been ignored, limited, misrepresented or otherwise lost,

**It is recommended that policy be enacted within the USBGN guiding documents that favors restoration and preservation of Native place names on the National Map.**

4. Whereas the scholarly and scientific understanding of derogatory language and its impacts on people's wellbeing has expanded significantly since the original adoption of USBGN policies and procedures,

**It is recommended that the USBGN definition of "derogatory" be amended to reflect the broadened and more inclusive definition now formally adopted by this Committee.**

5. Whereas the timeline for acting upon and issuing decisions on legitimate name change proposals could be shortened considerably by a reduction in the number of frivolous, incomplete, or otherwise noncompliant proposals received by the USBGN,

**It is recommended that the USBGN develop an easily discoverable and brief online training module on how to complete an application for a place name change proposal which would be required of all members of the public submitting a proposal to the USBGN before a proposal can be processed and acted upon by USBGN staff.**

**It is further recommended that accessibility issues and paper versions be available to marginalized communities.**

6. Whereas derogatory and offensive names are triggers for the toxic effects of personal and intergenerational trauma to certain marginalized groups long harmed by such names,

**It is recommended that a "content warning" be added to entries in the Geographic Names Information System and all web pages of the USBGN to caution members of the public about the possibility of seeing and interacting with derogatory or offensive place names as they explore data and other information.**

7. Whereas open and transparent government requires that the public be given every opportunity to participate in deliberation and providing feedback,

**It is recommended that the USBGN make public the list of proposals being considered ahead of monthly meetings for public review with clear and evident links posted on the website. The Board should also make posted links to monthly meetings (including how to participate) more visible on its website and create a forum for feedback before monthly votes.**

8. Whereas the use of generic and arbitrary names to replace removed derogatory place names has not yielded satisfactory results, and appropriate processes for finding replacement names may take months or even years of Tribal consultation and local engagement,

**It is recommended that the USBGN adopt policies that allow for temporarily “unnaming” places for the duration of this process, implementing neutral markers instead of quickly chosen and arbitrary replacement names. Additionally, the use of multiple names, including hyphenated names, for individual geographic features should be encouraged to reflect the diverse histories and traditions associated with the land or landscape. Use of multiple names is not intended to perpetuate harmful or derogatory names remaining on the landscape.**

9. Whereas the use of the word ‘primitive’ has been deemed harmful and inappropriate for use regarding humans or human culture,

**It is necessary that the word be removed from Policy IV, Paragraph 4 in the USBGN Principles, Policies, and Procedures.**

## APPENDIX E

### Education and Outreach Recommendations

The following recommendations can be prioritized based on additional framing. Some potential framing lenses to use include:

- Short term (1-3 years) vs. long term (4 or more years) timeframe.
- Time sensitive actions, such as completing testimonials with elders.
- Budgetary limitations (what can be accomplished within existing funds vs. what will require additional resources).
- Focus on recommendations that are already in process and build upon existing efforts.
- Work with groups that are already interested in replacing derogatory names.
- Prioritize recommendations that impact Tribes who are the original namers.
- Focus on educational components then move to engagement to build on increased awareness and understanding of the process.
- Actions to be accomplished by the Federal government vs. using partners to advance actions.

### EDUCATION/ENGAGEMENT

(a) The Department should develop a simple, easy-to-understand, graphically pleasing visual aid (e.g., flow chart, diagram, or pictogram) that clearly explains the process used to name (or rename) geographic features by the Board on Geographic Names (BGN). It should include the steps to submit a naming proposal, who are the key players in the review process, and where submitters can go for more information. Could be posted on the BGN website, shared at conferences, featured in social media posts, and given to schools and communities.

(b) The Department should produce a series of testimonials or a documentary featuring Tribal members (especially elders) or other affected communities impacted by derogatory names who successfully worked to rename features on the landscape (ex. changing Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky in Denver). Could be posted on the BGN website, featured in social media posts, and used for educational purposes.

(c) The Department should update the BGN website to provide more engaging and interactive information and tutorials on the naming process; the role of the BGN, State Naming Authorities, and communities; and updated FAQs.

(d) The Department should identify several large annual conferences (e.g., Tribal conferences, geographic/cartographic conferences, State Naming Authority conferences) and send BGN reps to explain the naming process and how people can submit proposals to change derogatory or offensive names. Could have a booth, participate in panels, or provide an informational session during the conferences.

(e) The Department should develop educational materials and curriculum on how teachers and other educators can discuss derogatory names, their impact on communities, how to use

the BGN process to change them, and how this is not censoring but communicating our history. Curricula should be geared towards different age groups and include assessments and measurable goals, and be based on report or landscape analysis on effective methods for reaching a variety of audiences.

(f) The Department should conduct research on what type of media engagement works for different audiences then based on that information develop a social media strategy to highlight the work of the BGN and the naming process, and why the work matters.

(g) The Department should conduct a series of town hall meetings online to provide information to communities, Tribes, organizations, and the public who are interested in the naming process. These could be advertised in the Federal Register.

(h) The Department should provide briefings to both Senate and House staff on the existence of the BGN, the naming process and why public input is so important, and current actions at the Federal level on managing place names (such as the work of this Committee). Also use that opportunity to provide a point of contact to their individual State Naming Authorities.

(i) The Department should create an online newsletter related to the work of the BGN and the naming process. Interested individuals and organizations could sign up to receive it.

(j) The Department should inventory what resources already exist, such as bureaus who have staff that create websites or tutorials, then utilize those resources to support these recommendations.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

(a) The Department should partner with existing external organizations and influencers, such as IllumiNative, that have followers and audiences on social media to help them amplify the Committee's work and the renaming process. Could also do that for TV shows like Molly of Denali that appeal to youth.

(b) Establish a formal partnership agreement between the Department of the Interior and Department of Education to develop curricula on teaching about derogatory names, the naming process, and how to have these difficult conversations.

(c) The Department should encourage State and local government websites to review materials related to place names and update the information to be more accurate and use less demeaning language.

## **RESOURCES**

(a) The Department should identify additional resources to improve outreach and education to Tribes, States, and communities. These resources could include hiring an outreach coordinator for the BGN; offering funding to Tribal Preservation Offices, Tribes, and others to support their renaming work; or hire a contractor to produce audio-visual materials such as testimonials and updating the BGN website.

(b) The Department should identify additional resources for communities to create updated interpretive signage in locations where names have been changed to provide context, explain the history of the older name and its impact on communities and groups, why it was considered derogatory and changed, and to encourage discussions.

## **GENERAL**

(a) The Department should provide materials in languages other than English to reach a wider audience; tailor information for specific communities into popular languages (e.g., if large Portuguese community, then have materials in Portuguese).