

BGN Policy Highlights with Comments

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Frequently, geographic naming reveals the rough and brawling nature of the environment that greeted the westward expansion. It is in these ways and many others that geographic naming gives us a clear, exciting profile of the United States.

The existence of a body of standardized geographic names widely available on a national basis, but related strongly by **local usage**, makes a large contribution to savings and efficiency in the operation of government, business, communications, and education.

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Chapter 1. Geographic Names Overview

Confusion, uncertainty, and misunderstanding occurs when the name of a geographic feature is spelled in different ways, when different names are used for the same place, **when the same name is used for different places**, or when a name is applied to a feature in an unexpected or different way from common practice.

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From the beginning, in 1890, the BGN developed domestic names standardization principles that have stood the test of time. **A primary principle is formal recognition of present-day local usage.** To this end, the BGN Domestic Names Committee (DNC) and its support staff work closely with State geographic names authorities; Tribal, State, and local governments; land management agencies; **and the general public** in order to determine the choice, spelling, written form, and application of each name for official use.

A new name will affect many people for a long time, so it is the BGN's responsibility to evaluate each proposal as to its appropriateness and acceptability.

The population of 95451 is approximately 12,957 people, with a margin of error of at least 10%.

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Domestic names decisions

The BGN has delegated to the DNC the authority to render decisions on individual geographic domestic names in the name of the BGN, within its sphere of interest and within its established principles, policies, and procedures. DNC decisions are therefore BGN decisions and become official when recorded in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) by the DNC staff.

Domestic geographic name issues and proposals submitted to the BGN are researched by the DNC support staff. **Input from State geographic names authorities, land management agencies, local governments, and Tribal Governments are actively pursued.** Summaries of the staff's research and findings, along with any factors that relate to the decision process, are incorporated into a case brief and added to a Quarterly Review List. When completed, this list is posted on the BGN's website for review by all interested parties. The

Domestic Names Active Quarterly Review Lists can be found at <https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/dnc-review-lists>.

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A docket of proposals that are ready for discussion and decision is prepared and distributed to the DNC members prior to each monthly meeting. At the meeting, the DNC reviews the merits of each case, decides between conflicting names, and approves or disapproves proposed names for unnamed features and name changes. Some actions may be deferred to allow more time for State and local response, or to obtain more information useful for making a decision. A record of the decisions from each monthly meeting is documented in the meeting minutes. Approved names are added to GNIS usually within three working days of the meeting. The DNC's meeting minutes can be found at <https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/dnc-minutes>

The DNC has identified several factors to be considered, along with its principles, policies, and procedures, when deciding on name problems and proposals. These include established usage, historical usage, legal usage, legislated usage, local usage, spoken usage, and written usage (see Appendix D).

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Public Law 80–242 (see Appendix B) instructs the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, to formulate principles, policies, and procedures with reference to both domestic and foreign geographic names; and to decide the standard names, their orthographies, applications, and their promulgation for official use.

Principle II. Names in Local Use

The underlying principle of the BGN for establishing official geographic names and their applications is recognition of present-day local usage or preferences. Exceptions occur when local spoken or written usage is in conflict with specific BGN policy. Existing published names, names in legal documents, and names with historical significance are given strong consideration in cases where proposed names differ from current official names.

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Principle IV. Names Established by Other Authorities

The BGN is required to promulgate for Federal use official names, including “administrative names” that are established by other authorities. The DNC renders decisions on administrative names only in rare instances where a conflict or ambiguity exists between Federal sources. The naming of administrative features is most often deferred to the authority that administers the feature. It should be noted that the names and spellings approved by these authorities apply to the “administrative features” themselves and not to similar names of adjacent communities or geographic features. Changes to such associated names would require BGN action.

Administrative geographic subdivisions (counties, county equivalents, cities, townships, and similar legally established units).

These entities are created under State or territorial law, which typically prescribes procedures for establishing their names. Included are entities that **generally have local self-government**, such as cities, **towns**, townships, boroughs, villages, and plantations (in Maine); districts, precincts, and similar legal entities established as administrative subdivisions of larger units; wards of cities; and municipios, barrios, and similar entities in Puerto Rico and the outlying areas.

Kelseyville is a community or census-designated place (CDP) within Lake County. A CDP is an unincorporated area that is recognized for statistical purposes by the U.S. Census Bureau, but it does not have its own local government like a city would. Instead, it is governed as part of the larger administrative unit—in this case, Lake County. Lake County is the governing authority for Kelseyville.

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Principle VI. Preservation of Names and Features

Once a feature is named for Federal use, it cannot be unnamed; the name can only be changed. The former name is recorded as a variant.

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All proposals are evaluated in cooperation with State geographic names authorities, Federal, State, and Tribal agencies, local governments, other authoritative bodies, and **the public**. BGN policies, **published usage**, and State, Tribal, and local governmental needs, will also be taken into consideration.

A proponent should carefully review the proposal prior to submission to ensure that it is consistent with BGN policies.

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Policy II. Name Changes

Geographic names provide important spatial, cultural, and historical references. Each name identifies a particular geographic feature, place, or area, and may be a distinct feature or part of another feature such as individually named peaks on a named mountain. This requires a high degree of stability in the written form of a name and its application. **Consequently, changes in existing names should not be made without a compelling reason.** Proposed changes must be submitted to the BGN for review and approval before being used in Federal publications.

“Name change” means formally revising the official name of a geographic feature in the United States or its territories and outlying areas. The BGN recognizes two classes of name changes:

- those made to bring official Federal usage into agreement with well-established local usage and/or with present-day local support and
- those made to eliminate particular name problems as in proposals involving names asserted to be derogatory or offensive, duplicate names, or names originally established on the basis of incorrect information.

Sec. 1 Existing names, especially personal commemorative names, which honor an individual, and those names in longstanding public usage, should not be changed unless the proponent presents a compelling reason to do so. Even when the historical basis for an existing name is unknown, the BGN will still treat it with deference (see also Policy III. Commemorative Names, Sec. 4).

Sec. 2 The BGN prefers to recognize present-day local use or acceptance. The BGN will consider proposals to change official names that the proponent believes are inconsistent with well-established local use.

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Guidelines

When a name change proposal is received, the BGN investigates the background of the current name and solicits recommendations from any individual or Federal, Tribal, State or local authority that it determines might have an interest in the feature. The BGN carefully considers all relevant factors when reviewing a name change proposal, including the extent and distribution of usage, historical context, and lexical meanings. In the event of a name change, the prior form appears in the permanent Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) record as a variant name (see Policy VIII. Variant Names).

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Policy V. Derogatory and Offensive Names

The BGN's guiding principle for the names of places, features, and areas in the United States and its territories is to approve for official Federal use the names found in present-day local usage (see Principle II. Names in Local Use). An exception to this principle may occur when a name is derogatory or is shown to be offensive to a particular racial or ethnic group, gender, or religious group.

Because geographic names are part of the historical record of the United States, the BGN prefers to proceed cautiously with regard to the use of names in everyday language, as attitudes and perceptions of words considered to be derogatory or offensive can vary among individuals and communities and can change connotation over time. Accordingly, the BGN will act on a case-by-case basis.

The push to change the name based on this speculative history is a dangerous precedent.

The name "Kelsey" is not offensive or derogatory. Kelsey is a widely recognized and commonly used given name, surname and name of geographical locations such as Kelseyville. To suggest that the name itself is inherently harmful is unsubstantiated and based on speculation rather than factual history. While some theories link the name to an early settler, no verified legal documentation suggests that the town of Kelseyville was named after any individual. Multiple people named Kelsey were in the region, making any direct connection to one person questionable at the very least. The residents of Kelseyville do not associate the name with any individual; they do not honor any specific historical figure, and the town's identity is rooted in its rich history, not any speculative or unproven connection to the name. (Continued at the end of the document).

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Guidelines

Any individual or agency may submit to the BGN a proposal to change an existing name that they consider derogatory or offensive. Such proposals should include reasons why the proponent believes the existing name is derogatory or offensive. The proponent must offer a replacement name as part of the proposal, following BGN guidelines for name proposal submittals. In proposing a replacement name, a conscientious effort should be made to offer a name that does not eliminate or obscure the original intent of the geographic name as a historical record on the cultural landscape, taking into account the historical, cultural, or ethnic significance of the original name.

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Policy VII. Duplicate and Similar Names

Geographic names provide unambiguous labels that identify geographic features. Local duplication of names (i.e., the use of identical names), or even the use of very similar names (i.e., names spelled differently but pronounced the same), often causes confusion and misunderstanding. Name duplication and the use of very similar names, however, are common within a county, State, or nation because naming is a natural process. While name duplication and very similar names in close proximity is undesirable, well-established geographic names should not be changed unless there is evidence of strong public support for the change.

Sec. 1 The BGN will normally disapprove a name proposed for a geographic feature that is already applied to another nearby feature.

Sec. 2 The BGN will normally disapprove a name proposed for a geographic feature when, in the BGN's opinion, the name is so similar to that of a nearby named feature that it will cause confusion.

Sec. 3 The BGN encourages efforts by Tribal, State, and local governments, land management agencies, and local citizens to propose changes or modifications to one or more duplicate or very similar names wherever ambiguity occurs.

Guidelines

Name duplication occurs when two or more places or features of the same kind, in close proximity to each other, have the same name in local or published usage. Name duplication may not be perceived to occur when places or features of different kinds have the same name, such as a stream named Long Creek and a community named Longcreek or Long Creek. Similarly, names are not considered to be duplicated if the specific parts are the same and the generic parts are different. For example, Long Creek and Long Branch are not duplicate names. Examples of very similar names to be avoided in close proximity would include House Mountain and Haus Mountain or Wilson Creek and Willson Creek.

Existing locations named Konocti: Mount. Konocti; Mount Konocti State Park, Kelseyville, CA; Konocti Unified School District, Lower Lake, CA; Konocti County Water District, Lower Lake, CA; Konocti Gardens, Lower Lake, CA; Konocti Road, Kelseyville, CA; Konocti Harbor Resort and Spa, Kelseyville, CA

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Chapter 4. Domestic Geographic Names Procedures and Guidelines

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) recognizes that there can be a need, for reference or commemorative purposes, to name unnamed geographic features. The BGN also recognizes that there may be a compelling reason to change an existing name, spelling, or application. The BGN does not initiate the naming or renaming of features but considers proposals for new names and name changes. Any name must be approved before it can be applied to Federal publications. Any person or organization may submit a proposal to the BGN.

Because a name will affect many people for a long time, it should be acceptable to the community in which the feature is located and to Federal departments and agencies, Tribal, State and local governments, and other interested parties that have an interest in the feature. The BGN's responsibility is to evaluate each name proposal for appropriateness, acceptability, and need. This is done in cooperation with Federal and State agencies, State Names Authorities, Tribes, local governments, and the public.

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Names under BGN purview

The BGN is responsible for all geographic names except those applying to offices or establishments of Federal agencies (see Determining official names in Chapter 1). As a practical matter, the BGN focuses on the names of natural features, as well as canals, channels, and reservoirs in the United States and its territories and outlying areas. It retains the legal authority to promulgate all official geographic names.

The only official source for names for Federal use is the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). GNIS contains all geographic names that the BGN accepts as official for use on Federal maps, charts, websites, and other publications. It is available at <https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/domestic-names>; see Search Domestic Names.

Usually, the BGN does not rule on the names of cultural or man-made features such as roads, streets, shopping centers, churches, schools, hospitals, and airports (see Principle IV. Names Established by Other Authorities). However, if specifically asked, the BGN will entertain proposals to name or rename such features.

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Local support

Because local use and acceptance of a name is important to the Board, a **proponent of a new name or name change is encouraged to provide evidence of support for the proposal as well as evidence of any published or verbal usage of the proposed name.** Such evidence may include copies of maps, government records, or any other documents and publications. Letters or emails supporting the proposal may be solicited from:

- Federal, State, or local (county or municipal) agencies,
- Indian Tribes,
- State or Tribal geographic names authorities,
- civic organizations, historical societies,
- owner(s) of the property on which the geographic feature is located, and/or

- others familiar with the geographic feature and the appropriateness of the proposal.

News articles and letters to the editor showing public awareness and endorsement of the proposed name will be added to the case file. Petitions signed by local residents and others who support the proposal may be included. However, because the BGN is unable to verify their authenticity, petitions are typically considered less relevant to the naming decision. References to websites showing usage of the name should also be included. This information is typically considered less authoritative, unless the website is that of a Federal, Tribal, State, or local agency.

Proponents should review the BGN's Principles (Chapter 2) and Policies (Chapter 3) before proceeding with a name proposal.

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Initial processing

Upon receipt of a proposal, whether it is to apply a new name or to change an existing name, spelling, or application, the BGN staff will conduct a preliminary investigation. The staff will determine whether the proposal includes the necessary details, and will request any additional information (e.g., locative, biographical) that is needed to begin processing.

If the staff determines that the proposal might conflict with one or more of the BGN's principles or policies, the proponent will be asked to address those concerns. If the proposed name clearly violates one or more of the BGN's policies, it will be returned to the proponent with an explanation.

Why this never happened calls into question the integrity of the process, these policies, and the moral character of BGN staff.

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The staff will check GNIS to determine whether the proposed name duplicates or is similar enough to that of another feature in close proximity (see Policy VII. Duplicate and Similar Names). If the staff believes the new name could cause confusion, it will ask interested parties to consider the matter as part of their review of the proposal. Similarly, if a name change proposal is submitted in an effort to eliminate duplication between two or more features, the staff will ask whether the existing names have resulted in confusion in the community.

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Preparing a case brief

Upon receipt and validation of a proposal, the BGN staff will prepare a case brief that summarizes the evidence submitted. The staff will conduct additional research, including consulting maps, books, websites, and other available sources to enable the BGN to render an informed decision. The case brief will note whether the proposed name is duplicated in close proximity. In the case of commemorative names, and if it can be determined, the case brief will note whether the intended honoree is already honored with an existing name. The staff will compile evidence indicating local use and/or support for the name. The staff will coordinate its research with the appropriate State Names Authority (SNA).

Using Wikipedia as an official reference is fundamentally flawed. While it can be a useful starting point for general information, its open-edit nature makes it unreliable for authoritative sources. The accuracy of its content can vary significantly, and it is often subject to bias, misinformation, and incomplete details. For any government agency to cite Wikipedia as a credible reference is a clear dereliction of duty. Such practices undermine the trust and integrity of public institutions, as they should be drawn from verified, peer-reviewed, and authoritative sources—not an editable platform where anyone can contribute without scrutiny. Any government that relies on Wikipedia for official matters should be deeply embarrassed by such a lack of due diligence.

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Publishing the Quarterly Review List

The completed case brief is added to the BGN's Quarterly Review List, which is posted at <https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/dnc-review-lists>. Each Quarterly Review List includes all proposals received and processed by the staff during the preceding quarter. A map is provided showing the location of the features included on the list. A notice is sent to interested parties alerting them to the Quarterly Review List's availability.

Kelseyville is on Quarterly Review List 454 (45 names) Released January 23, 2024

<https://d9-wret.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/s3fs-public/media/files/Review%20List%20454.pdf>

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Soliciting input from interested parties

Anyone wishing to comment on any proposal on the Quarterly Review List may do so at any time before the BGN's vote. Instructions for submitting comments are provided in the introduction to the Quarterly Review List.

Because local acceptance of a proposed name or name change is important to the BGN, the staff will invite input from the appropriate SNA and interested Federal, State, and local agencies and federally recognized Indian Tribes. Where appropriate, the staff may also seek comments and additional information from local organizations such as civic groups, historical societies, and others that it determines might have an interest in the issue. The staff also encourages proponents to solicit support from neighbors, property owners, local businesses, and others who are familiar with the feature and the name proposal. This process may occasionally generate a counterproposal to the original proposal.

SNAs are encouraged to solicit input from Federal, State, and local land management agencies as well as Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and Alaska Native Regional Corporations before issuing their recommendations to the BGN. A list of SNAs is maintained by the Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) on the webpage at <https://www.cogna50usa.org/state-geographic-names-authorities>.

Comments on the proposals on this Review List may be sent to: Executive Secretary, U.S. Board on Geographic Names/Domestic Names Committee, 523 National Center, Reston, VA 20192-0523; telephone (703) 648-4550; or by e-mail to BGNEXEC@usgs.gov.

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Preparing the monthly docket for a BGN decision

Once the staff's research is complete and all interested parties have had an opportunity to provide input, the proposal is placed on the next monthly docket for BGN discussion and decision. **The entire process from submission to a decision may take several months or longer, depending on the completeness of the proposal, the nature of the request, the number of organizations to be contacted, and the timeliness of the responses from interested parties.** The monthly docket is distributed to the BGN members a few days before the meeting at which the proposals are to be considered.

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BGN decision

At the meeting, the BGN will evaluate the evidence provided in the docket and render its decision on each proposal in accordance with its principles and policies. **Approval or disapproval is the result of a vote by a simple majority of the members and deputy members in attendance.** If a proposal is disapproved, the reason(s) will be recorded in the meeting minutes. A member may choose to provide the rationale behind his/her dissenting vote.

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After the decision

Following the decision, the newly approved name or name change is recorded in GNIS with a decision date of BGN YYYY, thus making it official for Federal use. The proponent and other interested parties are notified by letter or email of the decision.

All Federal agencies are required to accept the BGN's decisions and to update their maps, charts, websites, and other products before publication, or if already published, at the time of the next revision. If an agency anticipates that the name in question will appear on a forthcoming product, it is important that the proposal be submitted to the BGN well in advance of the publication date to allow adequate time for the review process. If approval is not received before the publication deadline, the existing name and application as indicated in GNIS should continue to be used, or removed from the publication until the issue is resolved.

If a name change is not approved, yet the proposed name or spelling is determined to have been published or used verbally, the name will be recorded in GNIS as a variant name. The variant will include an appropriate bibliographic citation.

The minutes of the monthly meetings are presented for review at the following meeting. Upon approval, they are posted at the BGN's Domestic Names—Monthly Meeting Minutes at <https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/dncminutes>.

Revisiting a decision

Because of the thorough and deliberate review that all name proposals receive, the BGN will not usually revisit a decision. However, if an interested party believes a decision should be revisited, the BGN will determine whether there is sufficient new evidence to do so. In such cases, all parties will be asked to comment on the new evidence. Revisiting a BGN decision does not assure that the previous decision will be overturned.

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§ 364b. Formulation of principles, policies and procedures; action by Secretary; recommendations of Board

The Board, subject to the approval of the Secretary, shall formulate principles, policies, and procedures to be followed with reference to both domestic and foreign geographic names; and shall decide the standard names and their orthography for official use. The principles, policies, and procedures formulated hereunder shall be designed to serve the interests of the Federal Government and the general public, to enlist the effective cooperation of the Federal departments and agencies most concerned, and to give full consideration to the specific interests of particular Federal and State agencies. Action may be taken by the Secretary in any matter wherein the Board does not act within a reasonable time. The Board may make such recommendations to the Secretary as it finds appropriate in connection with this chapter.

(July 25, 1947, ch. 330, § 3, 61 Stat. 456.)

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Appendix D—Terms and Definitions

Administrative name Refers to geographic features under the administrative control of a local, State, Federal, or Tribal entity. Also referred to as “cultural” or “man-made” features. These names are generally not under the purview of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, although the BGN is responsible for promulgating them for Federal use. The BGN will not render decisions on administrative names unless specifically asked to do so. Feature classes which fall under the administrative category are:

Airport	Dam	Park
Bridge	Forest	Populated Place*
Building	Hospital	Post Office
Cemetery	Levee	Reserve
Census	Locale	School
Civil	Mine	Tower
Crossing	Oilfield	Trail
		Tunnel

*Applies only to incorporated Populated Places

Features grouped under the broad classification of Locale include: Battlefield, Camp or Campground, Crossroads, Farm, Landing, Railroad Siding, Ranch, Recreation Site, Ruins, Site, Station, and Windmill.

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civil division

A legally defined place, such as cities, towns, townships, boroughs, villages, and plantations (in Maine); districts, precincts, and similar legal entities established as administrative subdivisions of larger units; wards of cities; and municipios, barrios, and similar entities in Puerto Rico and the outlying areas. These entities are created under State law, which typically prescribes procedures for establishing their names.

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Domestic Names Committee

Consists of members and deputies representing the Departments of the Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Defense, and Homeland Security, as well as the United States Postal Service, Government Publishing Office, and Library of Congress. The DNC meets monthly to decide toponymic issues.

established usage

A geographic name that has appeared consistently in written usage and/or has been expressed consistently in verbal usage, and that is supported by historical and/or current written materials and/or in folklore.

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geographic feature

Any relatively permanent part of the natural or man-made landscape or seascape that has recognizable identity within a particular cultural context.

geographic name

A name applied to a geographic feature. The proper name, specific term, or expression by which a particular geographic feature is, or was, known. May refer to any place, feature, or area on the earth's surface.

historical usage

A geographic name given and used during the early history of a place or feature; the name may be either obsolete or in current use.

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legal usage

A geographic name that appears in a document generated as part of a legal procedure established by a government body; the document may either (1) establish the name, or (2) apply it incidentally in order to identify or locate an area, site, or feature important to the principal purpose of the document. This category includes "legislated usage" (q.v.), which, because of its importance to the naming process, is given special recognition.

legislated usage

A geographic name established by a legislative body—Federal, Tribal, State, or local.

local usage

A geographic name commonly and currently used for a geographic feature, in spoken and/or written form, by persons having frequent enough contact with the feature to use the name on a regular basis.

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usage

Refers to various uses of a geographic name considered factors in a BGN decision, such as established usage, historical usage, legal usage, legislated usage, local usage, spoken usage, and written usage.