

Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names
National Park System Advisory Board
Address

Dear members of the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names,

The Coalition for Outdoor Renaming and Education (CORE) 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.

CORE is a coalition of organizations and activists dedicated to promoting reconciliation, justice, education, and access to public lands. Our organizations include environmental groups, Indigenous organizations, racial and ethnic advocacy groups, outdoor recreation organizations, and concerned individuals from across various geographies of the USA and tribal lands. In this letter, we respond to the documents published by the advisory committee subcommittees ahead of this meeting, providing feedback and recommendations, suggesting additional derogatory terms for the committee's consideration, emphasizing the need for a community-led and reconciliation-based approach to identifying and selecting replacement names, and highlighting the importance for the Committee to address derogatory commemorative names.

Comments on the Draft Working Lists of Federal Land Unit and Geographic Feature Names

We have reviewed the published preliminary lists of derogatory geographic features and federal land units identified by the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names. We greatly appreciate the work that the committee members have done to identify these derogatory names and are pleased to see so many of our priorities on these lists. We have identified a number of additional derogatory place names that we believe should be included on the list of places the advisory committee suggests renaming. In some cases, we recognize that the derogatory association of these place names may not have been intentional or that modern reinterpretations may sometimes obscure derogatory intent. However, these names – despite their original intent or modern reinterpretations – perpetuate discomfort, and create an unwelcoming environment on the land for many people. It is thus crucial that these names go through a community-driven consultation process to identify and implement replacement names.

It is important to ensure that replacement names do not contribute to further erasure or invisibility. Instead, renaming should be used to transform these harmful and offensive names into names that are empowering and joyful. Replacement names should honor the affected community and serve as an empowering tool for reconciliation and healing. This can be achieved by prioritizing renaming recommendations from members of the community that are harmed by the derogatory name. Incorporating the voices of tribal governments and tribal members in the process of identifying and selecting replacement names will also be crucial and must include not only local tribes but also those who were forcibly deported from the area.

Our recommendations for the Committee's consideration are as follows:

- **Red Man, Redmans, and Red Skin:** These names have derogatory implications toward Native Americans. The terms “redskin” and “redman” are included on the ACRPN's list of derogatory place names, however, we identified a number of additional geographic

places that use these alternative spellings. These alternate spellings cause the same harm and should be included on the ACRPN's list.

- **Savage:** This term has a historic derogatory association with Native Americans. This term is identified by the Advisory Committee's Federal Land Units Subcommittee as derogatory, but was not included on the Geographic Features Subcommittee's list of derogatory places. We believe all instances of "savage" should be removed from lands, including geographic features.
- **Nipper:** This term is an ethnic slur used against people of Japanese descent. The ACRPN has identified "nip" as a derogatory term and is on their list of Geographic Features. "Nipper" is another variation of the slur "nip" and locations with this name should also be included on the ACRPN's list of places recommended for renaming.
- **Rape:** This term evokes imagery of violence and assault. In instances where the name can be clearly traced to someone with this surname, an individual's first name should be included in order to avoid perpetuating the stigma associated with this term.
- **Wetback:** This term is an ethnic slur used against foreign nationals, most commonly Mexicans, in the United States.
- **Indian Grave:** This term has derogatory implications toward Native Americans. In cases where these names commemorate a Native burial site, the tribe(s) whose burial site this name commemorates should be consulted to identify a name that either has more tribal and regional specificity or in another way more appropriately honors the burial site.
- **Indian Head:** This term has derogatory and violent implications toward Native Americans. It evokes imagery of a disembodied Native American, harkening back to a time when it was legal to kill Native people.
- **Jim Crow:** This term has derogatory implications as it references state and local laws introduced in the Southern United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries that enforced racial segregation. Additionally, it is a pejorative term for an African American.
- **Tonto:** This term has derogatory implications toward Native Americans by perpetuating harmful stereotypes. In Spanish, the term means "idiot."
- **Negro:** Some Black communities and organizations consider this term as outdated and offensive, and have called for its removal from place names across the country.¹ Other Black communities and organizations see these place names as empowering and honoring place-based history, such as Negro Mountain on the Maryland-Pennsylvania border.²

¹ "Board Approves Removal of 'Negro' From 16 Place Names in Texas." New York Times, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/11/us/texas-negro-federal-board.html>.

² "Historical marker honoring Black frontiersman unveiled in Grantsville." Cumberland Times-News, 2023. https://www.times-news.com/news/local_news/historical-marker-honoring-black-frontiersman-unveiled-in-grantsville/article_16b6ceae-6957-11ee-a986-f7c41e6e4862.html; "The great divide: Negro Mountain in Maryland and Pennsylvania retains its name despite controversy." *Associated Press*, 2023. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/bs-md-pol-negro-mountain-name-controversy-20201003-ciqqpihj7vbr7fjw73627x5pyy-story.html>

Given that many of these names come from when Secretary Udall removed the N-word from the landscape and replaced many of those names with the term “Negro,” we believe that communities, and in particular local Black organizations and individuals, should be consulted to determine if selecting a replacement name is appropriate given the local context and history.

Comments on the Subcommittee on Geographic Features Draft Proposal to the Full Committee

We support the ACRPN’s assessment that the term “Coon” is a derogatory term and should be replaced on the landscape. However, we disagree with their recommendation that it should be “replaced on the landscape with the word “raccoon” except in cases where the name commemorates an individual. We believe that the ACRPN should prioritize a community-driven renaming process that specifically seeks to identify names chosen by and that honor and empower local Black communities, rather than unilaterally replacing these derogatory names with “raccoon.”

Comments on the Draft Place Name Reconciliation Principles

CORE recognizes the importance of the guiding visions and principles outlined in the ACRPN’s Processes and Principles document. While the document provides valuable insights into education, community-driven initiatives, and audits, we urge the ACRPN to incorporate detailed information on the implementation of these principles. It is crucial to have a clear roadmap for garnering replacement name recommendations and ensuring transparency and community involvement throughout the process. CORE and its expert members are more than happy to be a lead for supporting these efforts in creating education toolkits and guidelines and disseminating this information to communities.

Additional Recommendation

CORE also feels strongly that commemorative place names that honor individuals who have perpetrated violence and caused harm should be included in the work of the ACRPN. These names condone the violence and harm perpetrated by the individuals being honored and make people feel uncomfortable and excluded from these spaces. Addressing derogatory commemorative names should be included in this ACRPN’s work. We are happy to assist the ACRPN in conducting research and identifying these names.

Thank you for considering our views. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

AISES – Advancing Indigenous People in STEM
American Hiking Society
Black Kids Adventures, Inc.
Children & Nature Network

Conservation Lands Foundation
Junior North American Indian Women's Association (NAIWA), Eastern Band of
Cherokee Indians Chapter
Just-Trails
KABOOM!
Melanin Base Camp
Mountain Surf Creative
National Congress of American Indians Youth Commission
Native American Rights Fund
Native Organizers Alliance
Outdoors Empowered Network
Rename S-Valley, Fresno County
Sierra Club
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
Tali Elohi
Tewa Women United
The H2O Life
The Wilderness Society
Winter Wildlands Alliance

Individuals:

Alyson Merlin
Andrew Velazquez
Anna Durand
Chandra Taylor-Sawyer
Dasia Peters
Gerry Seavo James
Jadah Botello
Jake Kulaw
Jennifer Fairbanks
Jennifer Keller
Jessica Lambert
Julie Judkins
Kara Wooldrik
Keely Toledo
Kevin Simpson
LaKayla Hodges
Liz Eisele McLellan
Melissa Madrigal
Nancy Dickinson
Sharon Bassette
Shi Campbell
War Eagle Rain Tree
Zoe Ines Renee De Los Reyes