

[As amended by Memorandum dated June 2, 2025, from the Comptroller, Exercising the
Delegated Authority of the Director]

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Staff Directive 80-4 (Revised)

To: Field Directorate
WASO Directorate
Manager, Harpers Ferry Center
Director, Denver Service Center
Superintendents

From: Associate Director, Professional Services

Subject: Geographic Name Proposals

Staff Directive 80-4, revised April 22, 1987, is replaced by this revision.

This Staff Directive contains procedures for proposing and commenting on proposals for geographic names in or adjacent to National Park System units.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names was first created by Executive Order in 1890 and established by law in 1947. The purpose of the Board is to standardize the names of features on maps and in other official publications of the Federal Government. Proposed changes and corrections to official names, and any proposed name for an unnamed feature, must be approved by the Board before it can be used on Federal maps or in other Federal publications.

The Domestic Names Committee of the Board on Geographic Names deals with all name proposals in the 50 States, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, District of Columbia, and territories and possessions of the United States. This Committee handles questions of conflict, proper application and new name proposals, including proposals within units of the National Park System. The Committee's decisions on behalf of the Board, approved by the Secretary of the Interior, are binding on the National Park Service.

The Board has several policies which NPS officials must take into account when proposing domestic names, or when evaluating or commenting on names proposed by others:

- The Board recognizes present day local usage or local preference when possible.
- The Board does not approve names that commemorate or may be construed to commemorate living persons.
- A deceased person being honored by a commemorative naming proposal should have had either some direct association with the feature or have made a significant contribution to the area or State in which it is located.

- A person's death on or at a feature, such as in a mountaineering accident or plane crash, or the mere ownership of land or the feature, does not normally meet the "direct association" criterion for commemorative names.
- Generally, new names will not be adopted for features in a wilderness area or potential wilderness area unless there is an overriding need identified for purposes of safety, education, area administration, or other management purposes.

The Deputy Member representing the NPS on the Domestic Names Committee handles correspondence and attends Board meetings and monthly meetings of the Domestic Names Committee. The Deputy Member coordinates closely with the parks and Field Area Offices on proposals that affect NPS areas. To ensure that geographic name proposals are processed efficiently, Field Directors are asked to designate an individual to serve as a Geographic Names Field Area Coordinator. This designation, and any changes to it, should be provided to the Deputy Member.

Proposals for geographic names in or adjacent to National Park System units may follow one of two procedures. The first and most often used is the procedure by which NPS comments on names proposed to the Board by non-NPS parties. The second is the procedure by which NPS initiates name proposals.

NAMES PROPOSED BY NON-NPS PARTIES

If a name proposal is first brought to NPS's attention through the Board, the name proposal along with the available background information will be sent to the appropriate Field Director for formal comments. The Field Director will request and receive comments from the affected NPS unit manager. Where National Park System units abut other Federal or tribal lands, the unit manager may wish to consult with the appropriate land managers.

Managers will submit their reports to the Field Director, who will have primary responsibility for documenting the recommended NPS position regarding the name proposal and forwarding that recommendation to the Deputy Member. Evaluations should be completed and comments sent to the Deputy Member within 60 days. If more time is needed, the Deputy Member should be notified so that a request for deferral can be made to the Domestic Names Committee.

It is not unusual for park unit managers to be approached by advocates of a proposed name early in the process, and thus learn about a proposal before receiving background information from the Deputy Member. In such cases, the unit manager should refrain from actively or formally supporting the proposal until first conferring with the Field Area coordinator and the Deputy Member. Our goal here is to avoid awkward and potentially embarrassing situations that might arise when managers voice support for proposals which contravene NPS policy.

The Deputy Member is responsible for preparing the formal NPS position and transmittal to the Board on Geographic Names.

NAMES PROPOSED BY NPS

NPS staff may propose names for geographic features through the manager of the affected National Park System unit. Such proposals may be for any of the following or related purposes:

- to name an area previously unnamed;
- to correct a spelling or form heretofore misused;
- to correct or change from one name to another; and
- to confirm a name in local usage for mapping purposes.

In addition to being consistent with Board policy, proposals which emanate from the parks must be consistent with NPS policy. In some ways, NPS policy is more stringent than the Board's. One particularly sensitive area is commemorative naming. While the Board requires that a person must have been deceased for at least one year before a commemorative proposal will be considered, NPS policy stipulates that individuals will not be so honored until at least five years have elapsed since their death. NPS policy also stipulates that individuals will not be commemorated unless the association between the park and the individual is of transcendent importance or where authorized by Congress. (See NPS Management Policies, Chapter 9:17)

To have one's name applied to a geographic feature in a national park is a high honor. The five year waiting period is intended to allow a "cooling off" period, and to confirm that an individual's perceived contributions will stand the test of time. During the five-year waiting period, those who wish to honor the memory of a deceased individual should give serious thought to other options, such as establishing a scholarship or charitable fund in an individual's name, or making a donation to support some aspect of the individual's education, career, or recreational interests. If the individual truly made a significant contribution to the park, it might be appropriate to mention the individual in the context of an information folder or interpretive exhibit.

Attempts to commemorate former NPS employees can be especially problematic. NPS employees must keep in mind that, although we are the paid caretakers of the parks, the parks belong equally to all Americans, and we should not use our positions of influence to bestow favored treatment on selected individuals. Except for rare situations, our options for honoring the memory of NPS friends and co-workers should be the same as those available to persons who are not park employees. Park managers do have the additional option, however, of establishing a "wall of honor" or a similar commemorative display within the confines of an administrative building or in a similar location frequented by park employees. A display of this sort could both recognize the special contributions of park employees and serve as a focal point for remembering those who have departed.

After considering all policy concerns, the park manager should document the naming proposal and complete a Domestic Geographic Names Report, Form 9-1343. (Forms are available from NPS Field Offices.) The information should be developed in conformance with the U.S. Board on Geographic Names Guidelines (attached). It should then be submitted to the Field Director.

If the Field Director concurs with the proposal, the Form 9-1343 with the Field Director's comments and recommendations should be forwarded to the Deputy Member. The Deputy Member is responsible for preparing the formal NPS position, conferring with the WASO Directorate (if necessary to resolve disagreements), and communicating the NPS position to the Board on Geographic Names. Before acting on a proposal, the Board will obtain the views of appropriate State, local and tribal authorities, which in some instances include a State-equivalent board on geographic names.

Questions regarding this directive and issues pertaining to geographic names should be addressed to Chick Fagan at the Office of Policy, or via cc:Mail.

/s/ Denis P. Galvin

Attachment