

Wisconsin Geographic Names Council Meeting

June 19th, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Call to order

Attendance: in person: Carroll Schaal - Chair, DNR; Alix Burke – Legal Services, DNR; Howard Veregin - Cartographer’s rep, UW. Virtual: Wade Thompson - Parks & Rec, DNR; Dawn Vick, DOA rep; Eric Carson, GNIS rep.; Christine Koeller- DOT rep (outgoing); Katie Ginther – DOT rep (incoming) and Dennis Wiese – IT, DNR.

Katie Ginther was introduced to all. She will be replacing Christine as DOT representative on the Council.

Minutes from the March 21 meeting were approved and will be posted to the website.

Update / Status of March 21 recommendations

Decisions from the March meeting and proposal materials were forwarded to BGN. The Council also received Burnett County’s confirmation on their proposals that were tentatively approved so they were sent along as well. BGN will take them up for consideration and the council will answer any questions that arise. The BGN indicated that the Root River/Center Creek case will require some investigation. Otherwise, proposals seem straightforward.

Big Hill Savanna Case

This is a follow up from a previously submitted proposal. The Council and BGN had several follow up questions and have worked through them as detailed in the background file sent for the meeting. Dane County and the 2 surrounding Towns are in support of the name, but Iowa County did not respond. The Council worked with the applicant to determine the extent of the feature identifying the “hill” to be named and its beginning and end points, to orient a name. It will likely be classified as a “ridge” or “hill”. The Council will submit their approval of the name change to BGN and work with them on any needed follow up.

SO3405 - Addressing Other Derogatory Geographic Names – SO3405 was a Secretarial Order from US Interior that established a national task force to make recommendations to the Dept of Interior for geographic names that are derogatory and should be considered for renaming. This was in addition to SO 3404 that declared the use of Sq*** as derogatory and resulted in 28 feature names changed in WI last year.

Wade Thompson gave an update on a DNR – sponsored work group that is screening for potentially derogatory names in the state with the intent to send a list of such names to the US taskforce with our recommendations. The work group consists of Carroll Schaal,

Kris Goodwill, Bridgit Brown (Parks and Rec) and Howard Veregin. The group has started to curate a list of names that by consensus seem derogatory. The group will need to have one more meeting to finalize the project. Wade will share the initial candidate list with the Council and then will present final recommendations to the Council at the next meeting.

Policy updates

Raj Grewal, DNR legal intern, created a report highlighting the origin and authority of the Council. Based on her research, the Council may wish to pursue a new, more user-friendly application form as well as make updates to the GNC web page soon. There are several other suggested improvements in her report that may be implemented later.

The Council agreed seeking tribal input on proposals would a good idea. It would duplicate the federal process somewhat; the process BGN would follow allows for tribal input, but an opportunity to comment initially through the state process may be beneficial. Kris Goodwill, DNR Tribal Liaison, is willing to assist in this role. Christine shared that DOT has tribal liaisons in each field region that could also assist if needed. The Council will work to have a notification system in place before the next round of reviews this fall.

Meeting quarterly (January, March, June, and September) as needed seemed acceptable to the Council.

Meeting Summary/Next steps/Future meetings

The Council will forward the Big Hill Savanna proposal to BGN.
Wade will send out the initial list of potentially derogatory names.
Carroll will send a doodle poll for a Sept. meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 am.