
**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
2021 session**

New York, 3 – 7 May 2021

Item 6(a) of the provisional agenda *

**Names collection, office treatment, national authorities, features beyond a
single sovereignty and international cooperation;**

Recognizing Women with Canadian place names

Submitted by Canada**

Summary:

Geographical names are the result of the interaction between people and the lands that they know or inhabit. Names are given to geographical features such as mountains, lakes and islands for purposes of identification and referencing, or to remember persons and events. In a landscape that is predominantly named after men, there are notable examples across Canada of geographical features named for women.

Natural Resources Canada and the Geographical Names Board of Canada will launch an interactive map highlighting a selection of geographical features named for women from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who have been commemorated through place names for various reasons. The map will offer a sample of close to 500 official place names approved by the federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities of the Board.

This interactive map is the first national commemorative map to present geographical features named for women. Preserved in each name is a woman's association with a landscape or a place, and collectively they reflect a diversity of women's histories and cultural origins.

* GEGN.2/2021/1

** Prepared by Kristina Kwiatkowski, Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat, Natural Resources Canada

Background

The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) is the national coordinating body responsible for standards and policies for geographical naming in Canada. The Board is established under a federal Order in Council, and is composed of members from federal, provincial and territorial government departments and agencies, each with specific responsibilities for their respective jurisdictions and mandates. Working together as a multi-jurisdictional national body, GNBC members ensure that geographical names are consistently managed in Canada.

The GNBC is supported by a Secretariat provided by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), a department of the Government of Canada. NRCan provides infrastructure and support for the Canadian Geographical Names Database (CGNDB), the national database of authoritative geographical names and a key component of Canada's Spatial Data Infrastructure.

The desired outcome of this map is for Canadians to recognize and appreciate the cultural, historical and practical value of geographical names as a part of their daily lives and shared cultural heritage, along with the key role played by the GNBC to coordinate authoritative geographical naming activities in Canada.

This map is important because it tells the often untold or forgotten stories of women who have been commemorated on the Canadian landscape. This map also raises the awareness of the historical bias in Canadian place naming where it was common practice to name features after prominent men.

Data Collection and Standardization

Names from all of Canada's provinces and territories, as well as from Parks Canada, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans were submitted for the project. In total, 483 place names commemorating women were selected by the naming authorities. The names were selected to show the wide diversity of places named for women or women's activities across the country, geographically, historically and thematically. Each naming authority provided a curated list of places named for women, based on available historical information on the origins of the name. The selection comprises official names of geographical features such as lakes, rivers, mountains, islands, parks, towns and other locations that were named to commemorate women from many different walks of life.

The GNBC Secretariat refined, standardized and amalgamated the data, and collected web links for images and videos from other authoritative sources of information.

Map Development

The interactive map took approximately one year to collect, research, standardize, review and edit the data and to create the visual product. In order to best represent the data, the place names data were organized, coded and layered according to the themes that the women are associated with:

- Indigenous Cultures
- Early Settler / Pioneer
- Political Figure
- Community Service
- Medicine / Science
- Arts / Literature
- Royalty / Religion
- Familial

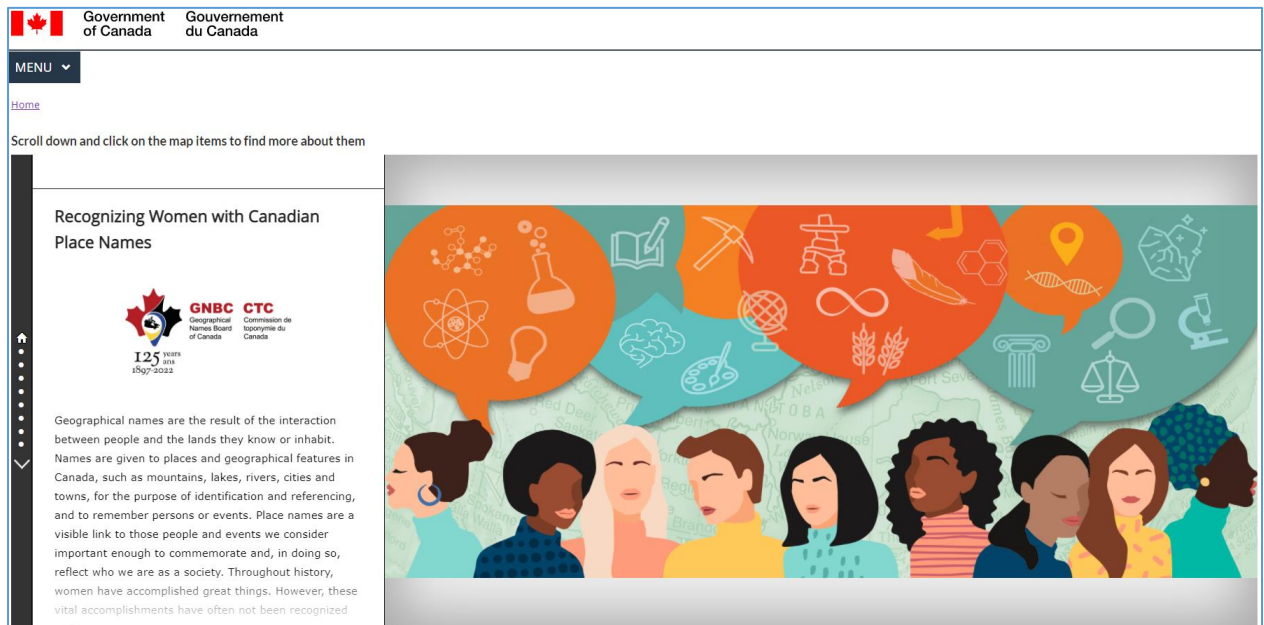
The map includes a pop-up box for each geographical name that provides details of the woman that the place was named to commemorate, the feature type, and the origin of the place name - if available. Images are provided where available, along with links to other authoritative web sites, such as the provincial or territorial naming authorities. A written narrative is included alongside the map that describes the purpose of the project, the importance of recognizing women's geographical names, and the role of the GNBC.

The screenshot shows the website interface for the interactive map. At the top, there is a header with the Government of Canada logo and the text 'Government of Canada' and 'Gouvernement du Canada'. Below the header is a 'MENU' dropdown and a 'Home' link. The main content area is titled 'Recognizing Women with Canadian Place Names' and includes a section 'Women on the Canadian Landscape' with a portrait of several women. The map itself is a map of Canada with numerous colored dots representing place names. A pop-up window for 'Anowee Lake' is open, showing a photograph of two women. A legend on the right side of the map lists the categories: Indigenous Cultures, Early Settler/Pioneer, Political Figure, Community Service, Medicine/Science, Arts/Literature, Royalty/Religion, Familial, and Unknown. At the bottom of the map, there is a copyright notice: '© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of N'.

Launch and Promotion

Recognizing Women with Canadian Place Names was launched virtually on International Women's Day, March 8, 2021, by the Minister of Natural Resources Canada. The official launch was followed by an extensive social media campaign promoting the map, as well as media requests from a number of Canadian news outlets resulting in a significant number of visitors viewing the map.

The women’s map is evergreen, and will be maintained on an on-going basis. Periodically, additional names will be added to the map from the official records of the GNBC. Canadians are also invited to contribute any supplementary information they have on these place names.



Conclusion

The *Recognizing Women with Canadian Place Names* map has been viewed by thousands of Canadians since launch, and will be updated based on public and GNBC member feedback. The project to develop the map is considered to be a successful and valuable endeavour; through the project, awareness of the role of the GNBC has been heightened at various levels of government, and widely recognized by members of the public who appreciate the work of the Board in commemorating women who played important roles, big or small, in Canada’s history.

The approach of developing an informative, interactive thematic map will be used again to deliver similar products that highlight official geographical names focussed on specific themes.

Many places throughout Canada are named to remember the vital accomplishments by women that have often not been recognized within society. *Recognizing Women with Canadian Place Names* provides a visible link to those people and events we consider important enough to commemorate and, in doing so, reflect who we are as a society. The map may be viewed at: <https://canada.ca/womens-map/>

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the work to highlight women’s place names using an interactive format;
- (b) Comment and provide input on similar work being carried out in other countries and effective or innovative tools being used.