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UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES



**POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE
STANDARDIZATION OF
UNDERSEA FEATURE NAMES**

Approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names
Advisory Committee on Undersea Features, 6 April, 1999
(Supersedes Guidelines approved October 25, 1978)

I. General

A. International concern for naming undersea features is limited to those features entirely or mainly (more than 50%) outside waters under the jurisdiction of states.

B. "Undersea feature" is a part of the ocean floor or seabed that has measurable relief or is delimited by relief.

C. Names used for many years may be accepted even though they do not conform to normal principles of nomenclature.

D. Names approved by national names authorities in waters beyond national limits (i.e., international waters) should be accepted if the names have been applied in conformance with internationally accepted principles. Names applied within the territorial limits of a state should be recognized by other states.

E. In the event of a conflict, the persons and agencies most directly involved should resolve the matter. Where two names have been applied to the same feature, the older name generally should be accepted. Where a single name has been applied to two different features, the feature named first generally should retain the name.

F. Non-Romanized names should be transliterated according to the system approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names (US BGN). When diacritical marks or special characters are used by the proposing individual or body, these will be incorporated into the ACUF names database.

G. In international programs, it should be the policy to use forms of names applied by national authorities having responsibility for the pertinent area.

II. Principles for Naming Features

A. Specific Terms

1. Short and simple terms (or names) are preferable.

2. The principal concern in naming is to provide effective, conveniently usable, and appropriate reference; commemoration of persons or ships is a secondary consideration.

3. The first choice of a specific term, where feasible should be one associated with a geographical feature; e.g., Aleutian Ridge, Aleutian Trench, Peru-Chile Trench, Barrow Canyon.

4. Specific terms for other features can be used to commemorate ships or other vehicles, expeditions, or scientific institutes involved in the discovery of the feature, or to honor the memory of famous

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persons. Where the ship name is used, it should be that of the discovering ship, or if that ship has been previously used for a similar feature, it should be the name of the ship verifying the feature, e.g., San Pablo Seamount, Atlantis II Seamounts.

5. If names of living persons are used (surnames are preferable) they should be limited to those who have made an outstanding or fundamental contribution to ocean sciences.

6. Groups of like features may be named collectively for specific categories of historical persons, mythical features, stars, constellations, fish, birds, animals, etc. Examples are as follows:

Group: Musicians Seamounts

Constituent features: Bach Seamount, Brahms Seamount, Schubert Seamount

Group: Electricians Seamounts

Constituent features: Volta Seamount, Ampere Seamount, Galvani Seamount

Group: Ursa Minor Ridge and Trough Province

Constituent features: Suhail Ridge, Kochab Ridge, Polaris Trough

7. Descriptive names are acceptable, particularly when they refer to distinguishing characteristics (e.g., Hook Ridge, Horseshoe Seamounts).

8. Names of well-known or large features that are applied to other features should have the same spelling.

9. The undersea feature name's specific element should not be translated from the language of the nation providing the accepted name.

10. The use of acronyms in undersea feature names is discouraged, but may be considered, if the suggested name is otherwise deemed appropriate.

11. Inappropriate names include those that are:

- (A) applied to similar features elsewhere;
- (B) full names or unwieldy titles of individuals, institutions or organizations;
- (C) commercial products or their manufacturers;
- (D) friends or relations of the proposer;
- (E) of the individual proposer;
- (F) derogatory or in poor taste;
- (G) of persons occupying high offices who have not contributed directly and significantly to the knowledge of the oceans or undersea topography.

B. Generic Terms

1. Generic terms should be selected from the attached list of definitions to reflect physiographic descriptions of features.

2. Generic terms applied to features appearing on charts or other products should be in English. In those cases where feature names containing foreign generic terms have achieved international currency, that form should be retained.

3. It should be recognized that as ocean mapping continues, features will be discovered for which existing terminology is not adequate. New terms required to describe these features should conform to the guidelines cited under B.1.

III. Procedures for Naming Features

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A. Individuals and agencies applying names to unnamed features in international waters should adhere to internationally accepted principles and procedures.

B. The attached form is recommended as a model for new proposals.

C. Prior to the naming of a feature, identification of its character, extent, and position shall have been established sufficiently for identification. Positions should be given in terms of geographic coordinates. Most, if not all, newly discovered features will have geographic positions determined by GPS. These features may be the same features as older, already-approved features, with upgraded positions. Care must be taken to ascertain that features are unique. If modern navigation techniques more accurately determine the position of a previously approved feature, the file should reflect the new position as the most accurate site.

D. New names should be approved by ACUF before being published.

E. If ACUF has reason to change the name of a feature it approved originally, information explaining the change should be circulated to other concerned authorities. If there is opposition to a name change, the involved authorities should communicate with each other to resolve the question.

F. ACUF will regularly publicize its names decisions.

G. It is recognized that international and unofficial national authorities for the naming of Undersea Features exist, e.g., GEBCO SCUFN (General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names), which is also the *de facto* authority for the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Ocean Mapping Series. Although some of GEBCO SCUFN feature-description standards and rules differ from those of ACUF in wording, consideration for acceptance of other-authority-approved names should be granted by ACUF. In cases where a conflict in feature names, types or descriptions appears, *a priori* evidence for usage in published literature or maps should determine the correct name of the feature.

H. It is recognized that some national, international and unofficial or *ad hoc* naming authorities do not regularly meet or routinely inform ACUF of their undersea feature discoveries and/or naming thereof. Efforts should be made to identify and correspond with these authorities to inform them of ACUF decisions, especially in waters adjacent to previously established coastlines.

I. Newly discovered and proposed feature names identified by individuals, institutions or agencies, which fall outside of territorial limits but within established EEZ claims by nations under UNCLOS-82 (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982), should be identified and referred to naming authorities in those nations and GEBCO SCUFN. This rule in no way acknowledges national or international claims by any nations under UNCLOS-82, or accepts international boundaries set under that Convention, but will be in force as a courtesy to other toponymic bodies.