

U.S. Policy for Naming of Geographic Features in Antarctica

The following policy statement guides the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (U.S. BGN) in rendering decisions on geographic name proposals. This policy applies to the Antarctic as defined by the Antarctic Treaty; generally, all land areas south of 60 degrees South.

As part of its naming activities, ACAN consults with organizations whose naming authorities interface with ACAN's responsibilities. For instance, when researching each new proposal, ACAN consults the SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica¹, a repository of geographic feature names maintained by the Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information (SCAGI)² of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR, an organization of the International Council of Science). ACAN also coordinates with Antarctic naming authorities in other Antarctic Treaty nations, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina, among others. Within the U.S., ACAN consults as needed with other committees of the BGN, such as the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features and the Foreign Names Committee. One goal of consultation is to ensure, to the extent feasible, that only one official name is applied to a particular feature.

In a separate document available on the [BGN web site](#), ACAN provides a synopsis of the context and history of U.S. activities in naming geographic features in Antarctica. Note: the names of Antarctic buildings, facilities, stations, and other installations, not being natural features, do not fall within the purview of ACAN or the BGN.

Persons proposing names for natural features in Antarctica should be aware of this policy prior to submitting an application. The context and history document can be helpful for understanding aspects of the policy guidelines. Questions about the policy, context, or history should be addressed to the ACAN Executive Secretary at BGNEXEC@usgs.gov.

ACAN may, at its discretion, revise this policy in accordance with policies and practices of the U.S. BGN.

¹ [SCAR Composite Gazetteer \(aad.gov.au\)](#)

² [SCAGI \(SCAR's Geographic Information Committee\)](#)

U.S. Antarctic Geographic Feature Name Policy Statement

General Policy

Under the policy here set forth, decisions on Antarctic names are based on:

- 1) Priority of application;
- 2) Appropriateness (note there are different factors depending on whether the proposed name honors a person or not; care should also be taken to avoid names that could reasonably be interpreted as vulgar or potentially offensive);
- 3) The extent to which usage has become established.

Sources of Proposed Names

- 1) Any citizen or permanent resident of the U.S. may propose a name for an unnamed geographic feature in Antarctica, or to change an existing name.
- 2) ACAN considers names that are adopted by naming authorities of other Antarctic Treaty nations.
- 3) Non-U.S. citizens or non-permanent residents should propose names through their own national naming authority. Foreign nationals who are or were affiliated with a U.S. government sponsored activity (e.g., a research project, research support activity, etc.) in the Antarctic, but who are not citizens of an Antarctic Treaty nation should contact the ACAN Executive Secretary to discuss options.

Categories of Names

Nominations to name features can be 1) personal names, i.e., to honor a person for their contribution to Antarctic issues, or 2) non-personal names, such as those that are descriptive, derived from literature, or that recognize organizations, institutions or events that have been significant in Antarctica. Requirements for name nominations for each of these categories are described below.

Use of Personal Names – Honoring a Person or Persons

Nominations to honor persons must address the following criteria.

- 1) A person being honored must have made substantial contributions to the goals and objectives of the U.S. national interests in Antarctica.
 - a. A specific definition of “substantial” is not set forth by ACAN, but the contribution(s) must go well beyond successful participation in some Antarctic-

- related enterprise. It must be more than that required to do one's job well, or to do good work over an extended period of time. In other words, the contribution should represent some action or activity that is well beyond the basic expectations for the job (or role) that required the prospective honoree to work on Antarctic issues.
- b. Contributions can include accomplishment through Antarctic-related research, research support, education, policy, and governance, including contributions through the Antarctic Treaty process or through recognized NGOs who are active in the Treaty process.
- 2) An honoree need not have visited Antarctica in the course of their work that resulted in their substantial contribution(s).
 - 3) Features may be named for living persons, but prospective honorees should be at or near the end of their Antarctic-related career. Exceptions will only be considered in cases where the individual's contributions are so substantial and exceptional as to be highly impactful in an international context. The nomination should describe the career stage and professional circumstances of the intended honoree in relation to their work on Antarctic issues.
 - 4) Ideally, and if feasible, the feature proposed to be named should be in a region that is associated with the honoree's contribution(s). The proposer may select a feature for the prospective name or may ask ACAN to select one based on the description of the individual's contributions.
 - 5) For names honoring people, the nationality of the honoree is not a factor in ACAN's consideration.
 - 6) Proposals will not be accepted as self-nominations or from family members or friends of the prospective honoree, or from persons who have a substantial Conflict-of-Interest (COI) with the intended honoree. In this context, collaborative relationships, such as co-worker or supervisee/supervisor relationships, or student/mentor relationships, would not normally constitute a substantial COI, whereas significant financial or personal ties outside of the relationships noted above could be a disqualifying COI. The nomination must describe the relationship between the proposer and the intended honoree.
 - 7) The proposer should determine if the intended honoree has already been commemorated with a feature in Antarctica. The ACAN prefers not to name multiple features for a single individual but may on occasion approve a proposal to apply a second name containing the same specific and a different generic to an associated (nearby) unnamed feature.
 - 8) Rather than name a second feature for an individual, it may be appropriate to amend the description of the existing feature to include the honoree's later career accomplishments.

Use of Non-Personal Names

(Including, for instance, descriptive names, names derived from literature, or names recognizing institutions or organizations.)

Nominations within this category must address the following criteria.

- 1) The nomination must describe the rationale for the choice of name, providing supporting information as appropriate.
 - a. Descriptive names may have a simple rationale; for instance, the abundance of fossils along an escarpment for a name like Fossil Bluff, or a meandering glacier's path for a name like Meander Glacier. Citation of scientific papers or photographs of the feature may be sufficient to support such a name.
 - b. Names that recognize the activities of organizations, institutions, or expedition platforms might also be straightforward; for instance, the name Bear Island to commemorate the flagship vessel (USS Bear) for the U.S. Antarctic Service Expedition of 1940. These nominations must include a description or explanation of the achievement(s) of the organization, institution, or expedition platform in advancing U.S. Antarctic interests as well as an explanation of why the achievement is significant and worthy of recognition.
 - c. Nominations to commemorate or recognize an event must explain how and why the event is significant to Antarctica and why the name is warranted.
- 2) The nomination must describe the need to name the feature, such as intended use on a map or publication, or for navigation.
- 3) The nomination must indicate if the name is already in use informally, e.g., not recognized by ACAN and U.S. BGN. If in use already, the nomination should describe the degree to which the name is used and provide examples. Note also if it is used by other Antarctic Treaty nations.
- 4) Nominations will be reviewed for appropriateness, for instance to avoid vulgar or potentially offensive names, or names that could reasonably be perceived as such. Names of sled-dogs or ponies used on heroic-era expeditions are not normally considered appropriate.

For both personal and non-personal names, the proposer must indicate that they have searched the SCAR Composite Gazetteer for Antarctica and determined that the feature does not have an existing name. In addition, the proposer should determine whether the intended honoree, organization, institution, or expedition is already honored with a name in Antarctica.

Proposals to Change Existing Names

A proposal to change an official name should provide a reason for the change, along with evidence that the change will not lead to confusion in the scientific or operations communities.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- 1) Who can propose names of features?

Any U.S. citizen or permanent resident may propose geographic names for adoption by ACAN and U.S. BGN for official U.S. government use. Citizens and residents of other Antarctic Treaty nations should propose feature names to their own country's Antarctic naming authority. Non-U.S. citizens and non-permanent residents who are not citizens of Antarctic Treaty nations but have been involved in U.S. Antarctic Program activities may request an exception; such requests should be directed to the ACAN Executive Secretary.

- 2) What types of features remain to be named?

Personal or commemorative names have generally been applied to natural features based on the magnitude and significance of contributions or roles in Antarctic work, with larger features (e.g., large mountain ranges, large ice-shelves, and sections of coastlines) being named for the most prominent people. Known first-order and second-order features are already named but proposers should still attempt to match the prominence of the feature with the magnitude of the significant contribution(s) made by intended honorees.

- 3) Can I propose a name in honor of myself or a family member, or for my best friend?

No. ACAN strives to avoid Conflicts-of-Interest situations including a perception that the naming is based on a close personal tie. Accordingly, ACAN will not accept for consideration a self-nominated name or a nomination that would honor a family member or close friend of the proposer. Names honoring people should be based on a person's contributions to advancing U.S. national or international interests in Antarctica.

- 4) Can I propose a name for an organization (e.g., university, research institution, government agency, non-governmental organization?) or expedition platform (e.g., ship, aircraft, etc)?

Yes. The justification for such names will be judged on the importance of the organization or platform to advancing knowledge about, or national and international interests in the Antarctic.

- 5) What are the criteria for naming a geographic feature for a person?

The proposed honoree should have concluded their involvement in Antarctic activities or be near the end of their Antarctic career. The person's contributions should be more significant than simply doing a good job, even over many years, on the activity that involved Antarctica. In other words, their accomplishments should be above and beyond their job description. ACAN's assessment of this will be based on the justification and supporting materials provided in the nomination and may include consultation with third parties.

- 6) Can I propose a name to honor a person who is not yet at the end of their Antarctic career?

Yes. However, ACAN discourages such names unless the proposer can provide a truly exceptional justification to honor someone who is at an early or mid-career stage of professional work.

- 7) I have several colleagues who support my idea of naming a feature in honor of a person. Can commemorative names be proposed by a group, or can one person's nomination be supported by others?

While proposals could be submitted by groups, ACAN prefers that one person take the lead on a nomination so as to create a clear path for communication. Names of others who support the nomination can be included in the application with an appropriate explanation of their support. Alternatively, letters of support may be included as part of the supporting materials.

- 8) How are features selected when a proposer wishes to name a feature for a person?

Proposers may either select a feature, or they may request that ACAN staff select a feature. In either case, to the extent feasible, features selected for commemorative

names should have some tie to the accomplishment(s) of the individual or organization being honored.

- 9) Can I propose a name that is not a commemorative name (e.g., not intended to honor a person or recognize an organization, institution, research platform, or event) for a geographic feature?

Yes. A case should be articulated in the nomination form that justifies why a particular feature requires a name (e.g., reference to the feature is important for a map, for navigational purposes, or research publication). The name might be descriptive or follow a theme for names on features in the area that are derived from literature. Vulgar or potentially offensive names will not be considered.

- 10) Can a feature have more than one name?

ACAN, in consultation with Antarctic naming authorities in other Antarctic Treaty nations, strives to apply only one official name to each geographic feature. When multiple names exist (e.g., from usage prior to coordination amongst naming authorities), ACAN strives to be clear about which name is the one official name for U.S. use (other names are often recorded as unofficial variants).

- 11) Can more than one feature be named in honor of a person?

Some people (mainly prominent people from the heroic era of Antarctic exploration) have more than one feature named for them. ACAN currently will not name a feature for someone who is already honored with a geographic feature name. This is part of the reason that ACAN generally considers names to honor individuals only when they have completed or are near the end of their Antarctic activities or career. If well justified, a feature name citation could be revised to acknowledge additional significant contributions to advancing U.S. national or international interests in Antarctica.

- 12) What other factors are considered by ACAN when evaluating proposals for geographic feature names?

Factors include:

- a) Chronological priority of discovery, naming, or other relevant action;
- b) The significance of the contribution of the person or organization to knowledge of Antarctica;
- c) Actual association of the person, organization, or event, etc., with the feature;

- d) Association of the person, organization, event, etc., with other polar exploration or activities that have a connection to Antarctic science, operations, or policy;
 - e) The significance of the contribution of the person to relevant fields of knowledge or to education or policy issues related to Antarctica;
 - f) The extent to which support has contributed to the sustained advancement of knowledge of Antarctica or to the collection of valuable scientific data or samples in Antarctica;
 - g) Other factors (uniqueness of the proposed name, etc.).
- a. To avoid confusion, the names of persons having the same surname should not be applied to features of the same type. The use of given names along with surnames may be appropriate if the surname has already been used.
 - b. The possibility of ambiguity or confusion with names already in use will be considered in deciding names. The duplication of names is undesirable. Attention will be afforded to potential ambiguities or duplication associated with simple descriptive names to avoid confusion about features.
 - c. Duplication in Antarctica of names, while common in other parts of the world, is undesirable, even when qualified by adjectives such as "New," "South," and "Little."
 - d. By long standing practice, names of sled-dogs or ponies from heroic-era expeditions have not been applied to geographic features by ACAN/U.S. BGN.
 - e. The committee considers the generic term proposed and may change a proposed generic term to maintain consistency of practice. One example of is the use of "glacier" versus "ice stream" as the generic term.
 - f. Names already in use will be considered in the light of:
 - i. Alignment with U.S. Antarctic naming policy.
 - ii. Wideness of acceptance, as evidenced by extended use on maps and in literature. Usage considered sufficiently fixed and/or unanimous may be accepted as valid grounds for approval of a name that otherwise may not qualify.
 - g. Vulgar or potentially offensive names will not be approved.
- 13) What are some examples of categories of persons and organizations that might be appropriate for honoring with a feature name?
- a. Leaders or organizers of major scientific activities in Antarctica or leaders or organizers of research and educational programs;
 - b. Persons who have made discoveries of outstanding significance in Antarctica, or leaders of parties that have made such discoveries;
 - c. Persons who have done outstanding and seminal work in the utilization of data or samples for advancing knowledge and understanding of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean;

- d. Persons who, through their work facilitating Antarctic research, have made outstanding contributions to scientific knowledge or to the techniques of Antarctic exploration;
- e. Persons whose outstanding heroism, skill, spirit, or labor have made a contribution to the success of an expedition;
- f. Persons or organizations who have made outstanding contributions in the planning, organization, outfitting, or operation of expeditions to Antarctica (including intellectual or materiel contributions) with the principal motivation being the furtherance of scientific knowledge;
- g. Persons whose contributions to knowledge of the Arctic or to knowledge in their respective fields have either advanced our knowledge of Antarctica or have expanded the opportunities for polar research;
- h. Persons who have made outstanding and seminal contributions to the training of polar researchers or to educational activities or policy development related to Antarctica.

14) What are some examples of non-personal commemorative names? These are normally applied to features that have an association with the activity or organization.

- a. Names that commemorate events (e.g., Charcot's Deliverance Point and Nordenskjöld's Hope Bay);
- b. Names of ships from which discoveries have been made (e.g., Cape Grönland and Cape Norvegia);
- c. Names of organizations that have sponsored, supported, or given scientific or financial assistance to Antarctic expeditions (e.g., Royal Society Range, Admiralty Mountains, Banzare Coast) or names of institutions of higher learning that have contributed to the training of polar explorers;
- d. Names peculiarly descriptive of the feature (e.g., Deception Island, Mount Tricorn, or Three Slice Nunatak). Descriptive names that are not unique nor particularly appropriate and for which there are likely to be duplicates are undesirable;
- e. Any other non-personal name that because of its acknowledged importance occupies a major role in Antarctic exploration or history (e.g., Mount Glossopteris).

15) What are some examples of fields of scientific knowledge that are relevant to Antarctic issues and appropriate for consideration? (This is provided for illustrative purposes, it is not an exhaustive list and no order of priority is intended.)

- a. Navigation and astronomy
- b. Oceanography and hydrography
- c. Surveying, photogrammetry, and cartography

- d. Meteorology and climatology
- e. Geodesy and geophysics
- f. Glaciology and ice physics
- g. Radio, radar, and allied fields
- h. Geology, volcanology, and seismology
- i. Geography
- j. Botany and its subdivisions
- k. Zoology and its subdivisions
- l. Engineering research and applications
- m. Astrophysics

16) What factors are important for the language and form of feature names and their descriptions?

- a. In keeping with long-established policies based upon trends in the normal evolution of geographic names, considerations will be given to brevity, simplicity, and unambiguity in selecting the form of names derived by these procedures:
 - i. The application of full names and/or titles of persons is not considered appropriate. Titles will be translated where their use is required.
 - ii. The names of organizations, ships, and other non-personal names, when unduly long and cumbersome, will ordinarily be used in some shortened though intelligible form.
 - iii. English generics are preferred. Complete translation of names will generally be avoided, but well-established translated forms may be accepted.
 - iv. An English generic may be added, or may be substituted for an included generic term, in the case of non-personal, non-English, single-word names that include a generic or a definite article, or both.
 - v. U.S. BGN-approved romanization systems are used for transliteration from non-Roman alphabets.

17) Inappropriate names: Names in the following categories will not be considered, unless otherwise appropriate according to the principles stated herein, or unless such names are widely and firmly established as of the date of approval of these principles:

- a. Names suggested because of relationship or friendship;
- b. Names of contributors of funds, equipment, and supplies, who by the nature and tone of their advertising have endeavored to capitalize or to gain some commercial advantage as a result of their donations. This would not include advantages resulting from testing of donated equipment under Antarctic conditions; in cases of doubt, the decision should be in favor of the individual whose name has been proposed;

- c. The names of products, sled dogs, or pets will ordinarily not be considered appropriate for application to natural features.

18) Can I propose a change to an existing name?

- a. ACAN considers proposals to change names when there is a compelling reason. An existing name that is now recognized to be a derogatory or offensive term is an example where a name change may be appropriate. Proposers should use the existing name proposal forms to identify the feature, explain why the name is not appropriate.