

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

IDAHO'S STATE GEOGRAPHIC NAMES BOARD

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Accurate identification of geographic names requires professional investigation and evaluation by a specialized staff and qualified reviewing agency. Aside from discerning place names that are in current use, appropriate national and state agencies establish standard spelling and define areas delineated by names that are recognized as acceptable. An United States Geographic Names Board was organized in 1890 and given statutory recognition in 1947. Composed of representatives of interested federal departments and agencies, this board publishes formal decisions that control federal publications referring to geographical features. Board decisions are based upon accepted principles of investigation and selection. Domestic names in local use are given preference. In case a name accepted locally duplicates another established for a nearby feature identical in form (such as stream, hill, bay, or basin), current use may be rejected in favor of a new name which avoids confusion. Derogatory local names, offensive to persons, races, or religions, also are rejected. New names referring to living persons are unacceptable. Aside from these not too common exceptions--except for duplication--local use (if well established in a reasonable-sized population) governs. In order to gain assistance in clarifying local geographic name information, state boards or specialists are consulted. Inquiries concerning Idaho geographic names have been responded to regularly by Idaho State Historical Society staff members for many years. Adjacent states as well as federal agencies have solicited information and cooperation for more than two decades.

Some state agencies publishing maps also have requested place name assistance. So Governor Cecil D. Andrus designated the Idaho State Historical Society's Board of Trustees (an appropriate, professionally-qualified policy and review agency) as Idaho's state geographic names board, January 28, 1972. Statutory confirmation of this assignment was provided by legislative act of April 2, 1982. As a government agency responsible for historical matters of all kinds (archives, library, museum, and general education and historic preservation programs primarily), this board is equipped to review geographic name information and to assist (through staff investigation) agencies concerned with geographic names identification. Information, rather than binding decisions, is provided. Responses to problems concerning Idaho geographic names are formulated according to standard place-name procedures and are consistent with federal practices in order to assure national uniformity. Meeting four times a year, Idaho's Geographic Names Board is prepared to respond with recommendations on a quarterly basis.

Information is available regarding Idaho's geographic names at the Historical Library, 450 North 4th Street and includes an index of more than 15,000 entries of names on Idaho maps. A United States Geological Survey printed index of Idaho geographic names (with coordinates, elevations, and feature classification) appearing on 1:24000 and 1:62500 maps, July 1, 1980, also may be consulted. Inquiries to Idaho State Geographic Names Board should be addressed to Idaho State Historical Society, Library & Archives, 450 North 4th Street, Boise, Idaho 83702.

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428