



**DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

**WASHINGTON STATE COMMITTEE  
ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES**

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Reconciliation of Derogatory Geographic Names  
MS-511  
U.S. Geological Survey  
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive  
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### **IN RE: Comment on Secretarial Order 3404 Regarding Derogatory Placenames**

The Washington State Committee on Geographic Names shares the goals expressed by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland in Secretarial Order 3404, regarding derogatory placenames. This issue has been of concern to the Committee for many years, both as it pertains to names referring to indigenous women and more broadly as derogatory names appear across our landscape. The State of Washington is committed to reflecting the history and cultures of our citizens in a historically accurate and respectful manner, and our long record of addressing derogatory placenames demonstrates that commitment.

To facilitate the implementation of measures taken to comply with Order 3404 and other orders that may have implications for geographic naming in our state, the Committee has agreed to meet at least quarterly while these discussions are taking place, which we think will probably take at least the next two years. We would like to collaborate with the Department of the Interior and the peoples of Washington to develop better names for these places. That said, there is a fundamental disconnect between the implementation of Order 3404 as currently proposed by Interior and our existing state process as designed by Washington's Legislature.

When establishing the Committee, our state Legislature took pains to ensure that changes to placenames in our state would require a deliberative, thoughtful process with multiple opportunities for public comment and review, as well as tribal consultation. The current proposal for Order 3404 implementation, in contrast, prioritizes speedy action. Although the Committee understands Interior's desire to move briskly, our potential responses are limited by our implementing legislation. We also question whether it is possible to have a process that truly respects the will of local peoples and appropriately solicits their input within a sixty-day timeframe, particularly as our nation emerges from a global pandemic. We are confident that it was not the Secretary's intent to prevent public participation in this process, but that is, effectively, what the current proposal will do. We must object to the process as currently proposed.



Each of these derogatory placenames represents the life or lives of indigenous women, a population which is significantly under-represented in historical commemorations. In the process of removing a derogatory name, we must not erase these women from our landscape. We believe that a diligent effort must be made to identify the specific women or women's activities for which these places were named, and to reflect that history in the renaming process. Replacing names referring to indigenous women with names such as "White," "Columbia," "Bonneville," and "Franklin Delano Roosevelt," as proposed in Interior's draft replacement names list, is not an appropriate solution.

Names must be grounded in our history and our communities. A computerized process that treats geographic names as interchangeable does a disservice to Washington State, and indeed to the nation. We urge the Department of the Interior to communicate closely with states, tribes, community heritage groups, mapmakers, and other stakeholders to develop replacement names which reflect the true, deep histories of this country.

The intentions behind your proposal are excellent and we thank you for taking the initiative to address this problem at a nationwide scale. We strongly encourage you to refine your approach to ensure that the legacy of indigenous women in our state is not erased, and we look forward to working with you as this process continues.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara E. Palmer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sara E. Palmer

Chair, Washington State Committee on Geographic Names