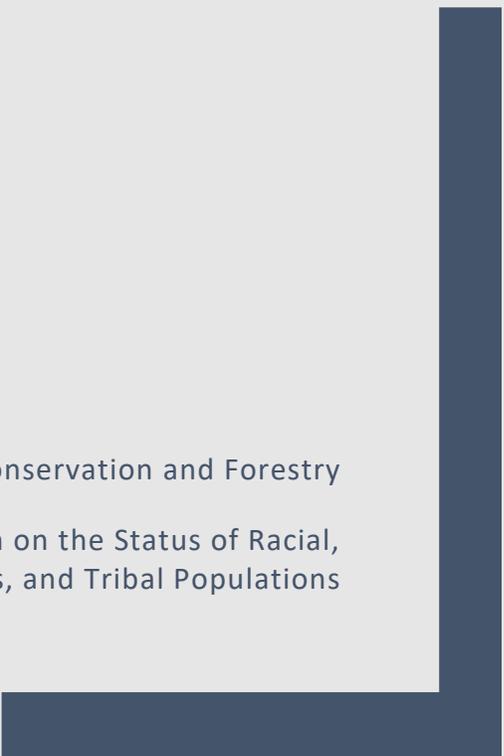


Report to the Maine Legislature

**LD 1591 “RESOLVE, DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND
FORESTRY TO IDENTIFY PLACES WITH OFFENSIVE
NAMES AND METHODS OF CHANGING THOSE
NAMES”**

Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial,
Indigenous, and Tribal Populations



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Executive Summary

LD 1591

Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry To Identify Places with Offensive Names and Methods of Changing Those Names

Signed by the Governor on June 18, 2021, this Resolve identified three tasks that the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations (Permanent Commission) were to jointly address before reporting back to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.

1. *Review the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 1, section 1101 to determine and suggest any additional words to be included in the current definition of [an] offensive name*

This law took effect approximately two months ago on October 18, 2021. Since then, no new words were selected to be added to Title 1, section 1101. A new legislative request, LR 2534, was submitted by Representative Rachel Talbot Ross in order to continue the effort to identify additional words for consideration in this Title 1.

2. *Establish a uniform process for renaming geographic features and other places that have offensive names*

Since LD 1591 was approved, DACF has researched the process of renaming geographic features and other places with offensive names. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) receives requests from the State of Maine, evaluates the merits of name changes, conducts independent research, and approves or denies requests. DACF has identified the state process sufficiently such that, in collaboration with the Permanent Commission, municipalities, experts, and individuals it can make a more efficient and expedited submission to the BGN.

The Permanent Commission, through LR 2534, would lead and house an *Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names* (adding a new Task 4) that would accelerate the process of name changes. The Permanent Commission and DACF would seek to include on the Advisory Committee members of the African American, Indigenous, and Tribal communities; people with knowledge of civil rights, anthropology, and history; as well as members of the public. The Advisory Committee will take a proactive and systematic approach throughout Maine in facilitating requests to the BGN.

3. *Explore the most effective methods of identifying the individuals, entities and institutions in the State that profited or benefited in any manner from the global economy of enslavement*

Time did not permit for this task to be explored. DACF does not have expertise in this subject matter. LR 2534 will allow for this work to move forward under the leadership of the Permanent Commission.

Introduction to LD 1591

This provisional report is offered as an update on progress related to LD 1591, a “Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry To Identify Places with Offensive Names and Methods of Changing Those Names.” The final text of LD 1591 is in Figure 1 below for reference.

This resolve became effective October 18, 2021. Throughout the summer and fall, DACF and the Permanent Commission researched the process of making name changes official in the state. In the fall, the Permanent Commission began to investigate the past practice and history of name changes as well as research those that are currently being used in Maine. The findings from this work are presented below.

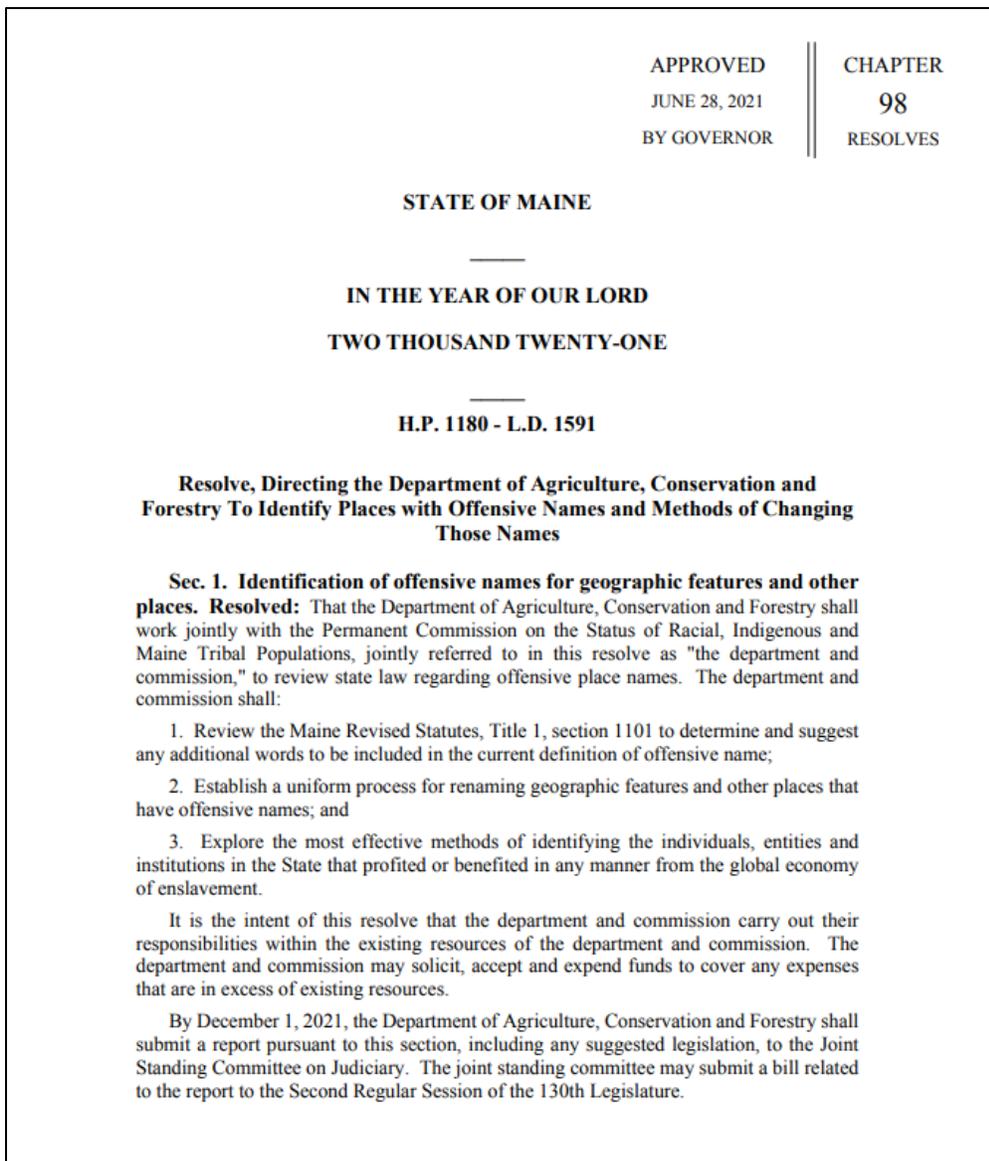


Figure 1. The final version of LD 1591 signed into law June 28, 2021.

Part I: Name Change Process Analysis (DACF)

Current Process for Changing Place Names

After the 130th Session of the Maine Legislature passed LD 1591, Representative Rachel Talbot Ross along with Dr. Meadow Dibble, Director of Community-Engaged Research at the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Maine Tribal Populations and Dr. Stephen Dickson of the Maine Geological Survey, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, among others, investigated the processes by which offensive geographic names can be changed. The group found examples of recent efforts to change offensive names that illustrate various approaches taken in Maine.

There are several pathways that can be taken to initiate a name change that ultimately is reviewed by the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (BGN) in the U.S. Geological Survey, Department of Interior. As such, removing offensive names in Maine involves submitting a request for a name change to the Federal Government. The BGN then researches and deliberates on the merits of a particular name change on a case-by-case basis (examples are in the Appendix). Approved changes are then made to a digital database (GNIS) used for national and state maps. This database is used by private companies providing third-party map services, among others.

Initiating a Name Change

Name changes can be initiated by the State of Maine, municipalities, or individuals and can involve multiple steps or paths within Maine that lead to a [submission](#) to the BGN. Offensive names recognized by the State are identified in Maine Revised Statute Title 1, chapter 27, [Section 1101](#) (Appendix) and have been the focus of name changes for over four decades. The fact that the State has determined that certain names are offensive provides justification and clarity to the BGN.

Approval of name changes by a municipality is also a critical step in making a name change. If an appeal is made to the BGN without prior municipal approval, then the BGN will seek to secure that approval. The ideal and most time-efficient process is for landowners or individuals to seek municipal approval first.

The Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) has authority through Title 5, Administrative Procedures and Services, Part 12: Human Rights, Chapter 337: Human Rights Act, Subchapter 8, [Section 4632](#) (Appendix) to address complaints about offensive names. This includes a preliminary investigation and then dismissal or agreement. If in agreement, the MHRC works with county and municipal officials. If local agreement is not reached, the MHRC may seek a civil action in Superior Court and be joined by an intervenor who brought the matter to their attention.

The following illustration (Figure 2) shows approaches to making a name change. While arrows show a directional process, the groups in fact work together to create justification and support in making a case for the BGN to consider. The BGN has also published a guide

to “[Principles, Policies, and Procedures](#)” related to offensive name changes and conducts its own historical and cultural [review](#) when considering substitute names.

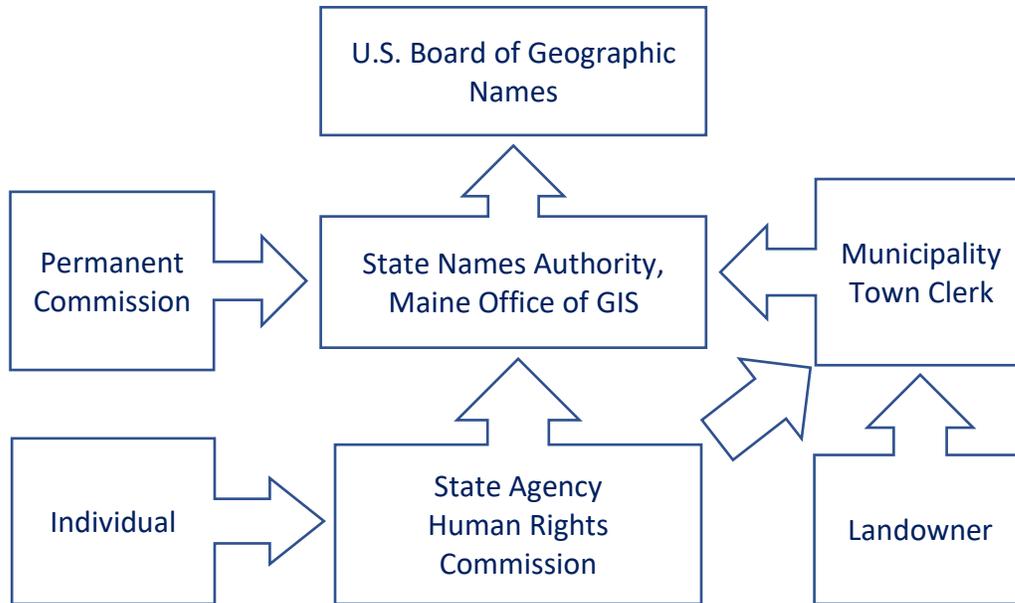


Figure 2. This illustration shows different pathways to petition the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (BGN) in requesting a name change. State Agencies might include the Bureau of Parks and Lands or the Maine Geological Survey—both in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. In cases where the Maine Human Rights Commission and municipality disagree, the MHRC can seek an injunction through Superior Court (not shown).

Renaming Places

If the BGN approves a change, then it will become official from the federal to the local level, will be recorded in a geographic names database, and will result in revised map products created by governments and the private sector. Once a name has changed for a specific location, the Maine Office of GIS provides digital geographic map layers that include new names. The Maine database will update names and provide digital data distribution for use by State agencies and others (Figure 3).

While we have, yet, reached no definitive conclusions, future consideration might examine the ways in which the Secretary of State’s Office could effectively contribute to this process. Through the Secretary of State’s Office, for instance, outreach might be made to Town, City, and County Clerks. At a minimum, such outreach could raise awareness about the name change process with the intent of expediting efforts to eradicate offensive names. Once a name has been officially changed, some guidance should be provided with respect to recording the name change in the County Registry of Deeds.

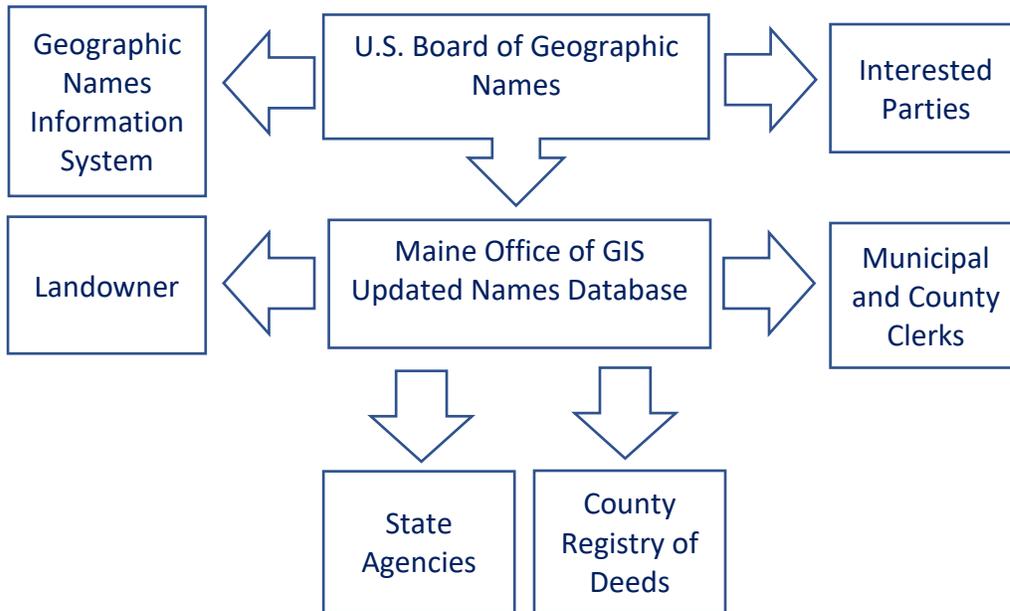


Figure 3. A conceptual flow chart of promulgation of changed names originating with the BGN and reaching interested parties, government programs, and landowners. The Domestic Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the official source of feature and administrative names. The Maine Office of GIS provides the GNIS data online for distribution in Maine. Continued efforts of the parties named in LD 1591 and its extension bill will help clarify or modify this flow of information.

Physical Maps with Offensive Names

Some state maps have been and continue to be produced with offensive names. These historical maps will be replaced with newer editions over time and will include new names. For example, printed and digital U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps or NOAA nautical charts may currently contain offensive names. The proposed Advisory Committee should have the ability to investigate the scope of the historical map use in derivative map products distributed by the State of Maine. This would include seeking alternative base maps or methods of cartographically removing offensive names from existing maps until federal maps are revised.

A timely solution to eradicating offensive names is needed because updates to federal maps are not made on a regular basis. The Advisory Group should explore various means of correcting existing products expeditiously, so that Maine is not reliant on the slow federal cycle of issuing new maps (both digital and paper). This process must also be responsive to the addition of new offensive names added in statute ([Title 1, section 1101](#)).

Part II: Issue and Context (Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations)

The Issue

When racial slurs are [shouted in school hallways](#) or [scrawled across](#) Maine roads, authorities typically act quickly to remove the offensive terms or symbols and seek to hold perpetrators to account. In the wake of such incidents, communities are often compelled to engage in a process of soul searching, as engaged citizens ask how their social environment may have fostered such virulent hate speech and how they might prevent such incidents from recurring.¹

Not so for racial slurs that are inscribed on Maine's landscapes and maps, however. Offensive place names have been used for centuries without causing public outrage among the majority or spurring an investigation by authorities into how rivers, capes, summits, and hollows came to bear names that disparage and dehumanize Black and Indigenous people. Normalized over time, these names are largely taken for granted. The White majority rarely thinks to question the origin or impact of these place names, having never been properly educated in Maine's Black and Indigenous history.

Members of these historically marginalized communities, however, have long bristled at these terms and have led persistent campaigns over the past 40 years to rid our state of such slurs. Yet even when these Civil Rights and Tribal leaders manage, as elected public officials, to pass legislation banning the use of offensive place names, their efforts have often been met with indifference, inaction, and at times outright resistance from the public.

Ironically, this is the very same public that is expected to proactively report offensive names to state and federal authorities as the first step in a convoluted renaming process that few officials understand. It is no wonder that little progress has been made on this front.

Complicating matters, states do not have the authority to officially rename their own geographic features. So, although the Maine Legislature voted in favor of removing offensive place names in decades past, no changes to these names can actually be made without the consent of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), which is part of the Department of Interior. The BGN is currently structured to act on a case-by-case basis through a process that puts the onus on proponents to identify the offensive name and to suggest a replacement. Many have found this process to be convoluted and lengthy, as it can often take years for requests to be considered.

In fact, a September 2020 [bill](#) heard in the 116th session of Congress intended to restructure the BGN stated that "the current Board renaming process is time-consuming,

¹ It is important to note that erasing racist graffiti and attempting to reckon as a community with hate speech do not prevent the population targeted by these harmful acts from being permanently marked by them.

lacks transparency and public involvement, and fails to address the scope and breadth of inappropriate place names.”

National Context

Efforts are currently underway to eradicate offensive place names from sites around our country. Last May, for instance, the Texas legislature passed a bipartisan resolution urging federal authorities to approve removal of the racially offensive term “Negro” from 16 sites around the state.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) approved this request and finally renamed the sites, an action it had declined to take 30 years earlier when Texas lawmakers first passed a [bill](#) “relating to the elimination of certain racially offensive names given to geographical features.”² This case illustrates some of the many issues involved in removing racial slurs when they are scrawled across our nation’s landscape. The recent reversal on the part of BGN bodes well for our present renaming initiative here in Maine. Our national racial reckoning of the past year and a half appears to have prompted federal authorities to take a renewed interest in this matter.

On November 19, 2021, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland [formally established a process](#) to review and replace derogatory names attached to the nation’s geographic features.³ A newly appointed Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force has been charged with facilitating the proactive and systematic development and review of name change proposals, in consultation with local community representatives.

These measures are encouraging and suggest that the Federal Government may soon be poised to provide critical guidance to states and municipalities, offering a streamlined process for the identification and replacement of derogatory place names.

That said, considering our decades-long failure to effectively implement existing state legislation here in Maine and to address the human rights violations that these offensive place names represent, we cannot afford to sit back and observe developments at the Department of the Interior, expecting the Federal Government to solve a Maine-made problem.

Past Legislation in Maine

Maine was ahead of the curve in addressing the issue of offensive place names. In 1963, the Federal BGN [converted](#) all mentions of the “N-word” in geographic place names across the country to “Negro.” Somehow this blanket substitution measure failed to eradicate all instances of the “N-word” in place names around Maine. In 1977, the state’s first African American state legislator, Representative Gerald E. Talbot, sponsored an “An Act to Prohibit the Use of Offensive Names for Geographic Features and Other Places Within the State of

² [“Federal board approves removal of ‘Negro’ from more than a dozen place names in Texas,”](#) Washington Post, June 10, 2021.

³ [“Secretary Haaland Takes Action to Remove Derogatory Names from Federal Lands,”](#) press release published by the Department of the Interior November 19, 2021.

Maine.” While his specific intent was to see the “N-word” racial slur removed from place names throughout the state, of which he had counted 10, the bill offered a broad definition of what constituted an “offensive name.”⁴

When Representative Talbot’s [LD 1661](#) bill was signed into law, the event made national headlines (see Figure 4). With the passage in 2000 of LD 2418, sponsored by Passamaquoddy Tribal Representative Donald Soctomah, the definition of “offensive name” in statute was clarified to include both the “N-word” and the “S-word,” a racist term long used to disparage Indigenous women. Nearly a decade later, it was necessary to further clarify the original law by putting forward [LD 797](#), “An Act To Fully Implement the Legislative Intent in Prohibiting Offensive Place Names,” as a means of prohibiting the use of any derivation of the “S-word” in place names.

Forty-three years after LD 1661 was signed into law, Representative Rachel Talbot Ross learned with great consternation that her father’s landmark bill had not been effectively enforced. It came to her attention in the summer of 2020 that five Maine islands and several other sites in the state continued to bear offensive names. When this revelation was [made public](#), officials hastened to change the names of three of the islands in question and instructed two other localities to follow suit.⁵ However, offensive terms remain inscribed to this day on Maine’s landscapes and maps.

⁴ “'Offensive name' means a name of a place which causes resentful displeasure to and which is repugnant to the moral sense of a group of persons, and which has a connotation of prejudice based on race, color, sex, religion, ancestry or national origin.” LD 1661, 108th Session, House of Representatives, April 14, 1977.

⁵ [“State moves swiftly to remove illegal, racist names from 5 Maine islands,”](#) By Colin Woodard, *Portland Press Herald*, July 20, 2021.

Maine Black Wins Place Names Battle

AUGUSTA, Me., May 27 (AP)—A bill aimed at removing the word “nigger” from the names of brooks, hills and islands in Maine was passed in the State Senate today and was sent to Gov. James B. Longley.

The sponsor of the bill is the lone black in the Maine Legislature, Representative Gerald E. Talbot, Democrat of Portland. He said there were 10 places in Maine with the name nigger, such as Nigger Brook and Nigger Hill.

In debate last week, Mr. Talbot told colleagues: “No one in this body has been brought up under that name and still carries the scar of that name. My children still grow up under that name. It’s derogatory to me, my children and to my relatives.”

The bill won unanimous final approval without further debate in the Senate. It was passed in the House yesterday by a vote of 109 to 26.

Governor Longley has 10 days to act on the measure or it becomes law without his signature.

Under the measure, persons object-

ing to the use of the word “nigger” as a name of a geographic place may file a complaint with the Maine Human Rights Commission. The commission would then work with local officials to change the name.

Mr. Talbot said he had introduced the bill because bureaucrats had refused to help him seek changes in objectionable names of places.

In 1974 he approached the Bureau of Mapping of the State Conservation Department on the problem and was advised to write to Federal officials. But, despite a letter from the United States Board of Geographical Names saying that offensive names were prohibited, the state refused to act, Mr. Talbot said.

His original bill would have applied to all “repugnant” names. But it was amended to apply only to places with the word “nigger” because legislators said they were concerned there would be attempts to rename well known places such as Squaw Mountain or Frenchman Bay.

Figure 4. Article published in the New York Times May 28, 1977.

What Constitutes an Offensive Name?

Sensibilities change over time, as does usage. Our understanding in 2021 of what constitutes an offensive name has naturally evolved since LD 1661 was passed four decades ago.

Whether it was in response to that 1977 law or due to changing public perceptions, it seems that the word “Negro” came to replace the “N-word” in many place names around Maine.

There are currently 12 geographic features in the state of Maine whose names contain the word “Negro,” according to the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), which is maintained by the United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN). The state of Georgia, by comparison, has only eight.

As for place names containing the “S-word,” which LD 797 was supposed to have eliminated, one instance appears to have eluded those measures (p. 27 in the Appendix).⁶

Because the GNIS database contains only information about physical geographic features—that is, islands, mountains, lakes, streams, and the like—it is possible that many other roads or cultural features in Maine continue to bear these offensive words in their names.

Whereas “Negro” may have once been widely considered neutral and appropriate language in 20th century America, today it is generally considered dated and offensive. To most African Americans, the term evokes a proprietary and paternalistic relationship between White people and Black people. The fact that the term remains embedded in certain organization names, such as the United Negro College Fund, or in expressions such as “negro spirituals,” should not cloud the fact that its use is incongruous with present attitudes. Even the Merriam-Webster Dictionary considers the term “dated” and states that “most people now consider the word offensive.”

Though the term “Negro” does not carry as potently dehumanizing a semantic charge as the “N-word,” it may as well, since its incorporation into place names throughout Maine results from a simple substitution. When “Sixth N-word Brook Lake” in Aroostook County became “Sixth Negro Brook Lake,” one highly offensive word was replaced by a slightly less offensive one. The residue of derision remains, however. The shift to replace the “N-word” with the term “Negro” is merely indicative of the passage of time and does not suggest an evolution in mentalities.

The Problem with Local Control

At a town meeting held last May, residents of Castine voted on whether to change the names of “Upper Negro” and “Lower Negro” islands in the Bagaduce River. The measure passed by a narrow margin, with 44 residents in favor and 33 opposed. The vote could easily have gone the other way, as it did the last time the issue was raised for public consideration. Some town residents felt that the term “Negro” was in no way offensive. Not one person of color was present, however, to weigh in on this important issue.

While grassroots initiatives to change place names at the local level should be encouraged, eliminating racist slurs from our maps and landscapes cannot be the sole prerogative of towns and municipalities. After all, this is a human rights issue.

According to the 2021 U.S. Federal Census, Maine’s population is 90.8 percent White. This state, like others in New England, has a documented—though not frequently discussed—history of slave trading, enslaving, profiting from slavery, perpetrating racial violence and exclusion, and upholding white supremacy. As such, to allow the prerogative for place naming to reside entirely with communities naturally results in a deeply tendentious process.

⁶ The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has apparently never received a petition to change the name of [White Squaw Island](#) in Penobscot County, according to the GNIS.

Since existing methods of identifying and replacing offensive place names require the public in predominantly White communities to take initiative and to navigate a confusing labyrinth of state and federal agencies, and since roughly half of the public doesn't consider these names offensive to begin with while the other half remains largely indifferent or apathetic, then we should hardly be surprised that three bills and 40 years have not been sufficient to eradicate derogatory and racially offensive names from our landscape.

Status Quo is not an Option

Offensive place names do not just mar our state's landscapes. By dehumanizing certain groups, they cause real harm to citizens and undermine our efforts to build diverse and equitable communities. When mountains, islands, hills, and brooks are identified by racial slurs, those spaces communicate the notion that some people belong and are welcome here and others not.

It is an injustice that the contributions of Maine's historical communities of color have been obfuscated in the official historical record and relegated to the margins of our regional narrative while these offensive place names have been allowed to persist.

Similarly, when towns, streets, and entire counties are named after prominent forebears who earned their wealth and advantages through slave trading and investment in the economy of enslavement, those names communicate our values as a community.

A thorough audit of place names is sorely needed. Preserving offensive place names is not a valid means of preserving history; it is a means of perpetuating racism. What we must work to preserve is human dignity.

A New Bill

LR 2534

An Act to Clarify The Reporting Responsibilities and Extend the Reporting Deadline For the Identification of Places In This State With Offensive Names

The purpose of this bill is to extend the timeline for accomplishing all of the tasks outlined in LD 1591, add an additional task, and establish primary statutory responsibility for carrying out all of this work.

Specifically, the new bill will put forth the following tasks:

***Sec. 1.** Identification of offensive names for geographic features and other places.*

***Resolved:** That the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations shall work jointly with the Department of Agriculture,*

Conservation and Forestry, jointly referred to in this resolve as "the commission and the department," to review state law regarding offensive place names.

The commission and the department shall:

- 1. Review the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 1, section 1101 to determine and suggest any additional words to be included in the current definition of offensive name;*
- 2. Establish a uniform process for renaming geographic features and other places that have offensive names;*
- 3. Explore the most effective methods of identifying the individuals, entities and institutions in the State that profited or benefited in any manner from the global economy of enslavement.*
- 4. Create an Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names to be led by and housed within the Permanent Commission with the mission of accelerating the process by which derogatory geographic names in Maine are identified and replaced. The commission and the department shall determine the number of members to serve on the Advisory Committee, which may include representation from Indigenous and Tribal populations; members of the African American community; people with a deep knowledge of civil rights, anthropology, and history; as well as members of the general public. In consultation with local community representatives and municipalities, the Advisory Committee will broadly solicit, review, and recommend changes in the interest of facilitating the proactive and systematic development and review of name change proposals. It will establish a process by which to solicit and assist with proposals to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names to change derogatory names. It will engage with historically impacted populations, as well as state, federal, and local governments, and with the public.*

It is the intent of this resolve that the commission and the department carry out their responsibilities within the existing resources of the commission and the department. The commission and the department may solicit, accept, and expend funds to cover any expenses that are in excess of existing resources.

By December 1, 2022, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations shall submit a report pursuant to this section, including any suggested legislation, to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.

Summary

Given that legislation from the 130th Session only went into effect six weeks before this report was due, representatives from the Permanent Commission and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry were unable to meet and begin work on this bill until October 18, 2021.

As this report has sought to demonstrate, the process of defining, identifying, and eradicating offensive place names is complex. Bringing clarity to the process and devising a streamlined pathway toward meaningful change requires careful planning, coordination among authorities, public education, and a sustained effort led by the communities most impacted by derogatory names and the history of racial harm from which they emerge.

Past attempts at eradicating offensive place names in Maine have fallen short for several reasons. For starters, the definition of “offensive” in statute was either considered too broad to be prescriptive or rather too specific to absorb new terms as sensibilities changed over time. As we have seen, the name change process is convoluted and relies on Maine’s predominantly White communities to take proactive measures, when the majority in these communities lack the historical and cultural understanding that would allow them to recognize the deeply offensive and harmful nature of the derogatory terms in question and comprehend the urgency in eliminating them. Furthermore, in the necessary coordination between Federal and State authorities, things can easily slip through the cracks—and they routinely do.

Offensive place names emerge from a history of racial violence and oppression. The work to rid our landscapes and maps of derogatory terms needs to be firmly grounded in a comprehensive understanding of that history and informed by the lived experience of the impacted populations. The State of Maine is ill-equipped to make historically and ethically informed decisions about the definition, identification, and eradication of offensive place names. Currently, a single individual—the State Naming Authority—voluntarily bears that charge. But when offensive names exist in the public domain, the public must be engaged in the process of redressing historical wrongs.

The Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names proposed in the new bill can serve as a historically and culturally informed council made up of members most impacted by offensive place names. The public deserves easy access, at no cost, to consultation in matters concerning offensive place names. The Advisory Committee will provide a low-barrier avenue for redress.

In pursuing the task of establishing an effective, proactive process for the systematic identification and eradication of offensive place names in Maine, the new Advisory Committee will seek to establish contact via Maine’s Congressional Delegation with the newly created Federal Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force.

Other tasks in the new bill to be taken up by the Advisory Committee include identifying additional offensive names; conducting a more systematic and comprehensive geographic

search; expanding the definition of “offensive” in statute; proposing suitable replacement names; developing a means of educating the public; engaging municipalities; widely soliciting input; and serving as clearinghouse for information.

APPENDICES

Legislation & Statute

Title 5: ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND SERVICES | Part 12: HUMAN RIGHTS Chapter 337: HUMAN RIGHTS ACT | Subchapter 8: MISCELLANEOUS

§4632. Offensive names

1. Complaint. Any person, including any employee of the commission, may file a complaint with the commission which states the belief that a name of a place is offensive, as defined in [Title 1, section 1101](#).

[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

2. Preliminary investigation. Upon receipt of such a complaint, the commission or its delegated single commissioner or investigator shall conduct a brief preliminary investigation as it deems necessary to determine whether the name of the place is offensive.

[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

3. Order of dismissal. If the commission finds that the place does not have an offensive name, it shall enter an order so finding, and shall dismiss the proceeding.

[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

4. Agreement. If the commission finds that the place does have an offensive name, it shall endeavor to accomplish a change in the name by an agreement with the municipal officers or county commissioners to initiate and implement the actions required to change the name, as provided in [Title 1, section 1104](#).

[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

5. Civil action by commission. If the commission is unable to obtain an agreement under subsection 4 or if the agreement is not carried out, the commission shall file in the Superior Court a civil action seeking such relief as is appropriate.

[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

6. Procedure in Superior Court. Any action filed by the commission pursuant to subsection 5 shall be heard by the Superior Court and shall be subject to the following provisions:

A. The court shall hear the case and grant relief as in other civil actions for injunctions. [PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

B. Any such action shall be brought in the name of the commission. [PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

C. Any person aggrieved by the alleged offensive name may intervene in such an action. [PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

D. In no such action brought by the commission shall any injunction bond be required; nor shall damages be assessed for the wrongful issuance of an injunction. [PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]

E. If the court finds that a place has an offensive name, its judgment shall specify an appropriate remedy. Such remedy shall include an order requiring the municipal officers or county commissioners:

(1) To initiate procedures, which may be described in the order, for changing the name of the place, and
(2) To have completed the change of name and the notification as required in [Title 1, section 1104](#), within 90 days of the issuance of the order. [PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]
[PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).]
SECTION HISTORY
PL 1977, c. 259, §3 (NEW).

[Title 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS](#) | Chapter 27: NAMES OF PLACES

§1104. Responsibility of municipal officers and county commissioners
The municipal officers of the municipality or the county commissioners responsible for the unorganized territory, in which a place is found pursuant to [Title 5, section 4632](#), to have an offensive name, shall have the following responsibilities: [PL 1977, c. 259, §1 (NEW).]
1. Reasonable actions. They shall take whatever reasonable actions are required to complete a change in the offensive name. They may hold public hearings on selecting a new name; and
[PL 1999, c. 613, §2 (AMD).]
2. Notification. Unless a court order is issued under [Title 5, section 4632](#) specifying a different deadline, within 6 months of the determination that the place has an offensive name, they shall provide notice of the new name to the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior and other public agencies, boards, committees or other groups responsible for changing names of places and for ensuring that such name changes appear on maps and other public documents.
[PL 1999, c. 613, §2 (AMD); PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. W, §6 (REV).]
SECTION HISTORY
PL 1977, c. 259, §1 (NEW). PL 1999, c. 613, §2 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. W, §6 (REV).

[LD 2418](#) An Act Concerning Offensive Names

LR 3466

Item 1

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 1 MRSA §1101, sub-§1, as enacted by PL 1977, c. 259, §1, is amended to read:

1. Offensive name. "Offensive name" means a name of a place which includes the designation "nigger" or the designation "squaw" as a separate word or as part of a word.

SUMMARY

This bill expands the law prohibiting the use of offensive names to designate places to also prohibit the use of the word "squaw."

124th Maine Legislature, First Regular Session
[LD #797](#) An Act To Fully Implement the Legislative Intent in Prohibiting Offensive Place Names

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 1 MRSA §1101, sub-§1, as amended by PL 2001, c. 471, Pt. D, §3, is further amended to read:

1. Offensive name. "Offensive name" means a name of a place that includes:

A. The designation "nigger" or "squaw" or any derivation of "squaw" or "squa" as a separate word or as part of a word; or phrase.

B. The designation "squa" as a separate word.

SUMMARY

This bill clarifies the law concerning offensive place names prohibiting the use of terminology degrading towards women by prohibiting any derivation of "squaw" or "squa" as a separate word or as part of a word or phrase.

Name Change Authorities

The U.S. [Board](#) on Geographic Names has a policy and procedural [document](#) within which Policy V, among others, relates to offensive name changes within the larger framework of changing names in the U.S. The policy document is helpful explaining the process and interactions with stakeholders. There is a BGN [form](#) to submit name changes.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN)

<https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/board-on-geographic-names>

USGSBN Domestic Names

<https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/board-on-geographic-names/domestic-names>

<https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/board-on-geographic-names/domestic-names?p=132:LOGIN:14752306922987>

USGSBN minutes

https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=geonames_web:minutes

Domestic Geographic Names and Policies (of the BGN)

Changing offensive names (Policy V on p. 15)

https://geonames.usgs.gov/docs/pubs/DNC_PPP_JAN_2021_V.2.1.pdf

Federal Form to Change a Name

https://geonames.usgs.gov/docs/pubs/DGNR_form.pdf

Contact: Executive Secretary, U.S. Board on Geographic Names BGNEXEC@usgs.gov

STATE OF MAINE

MaineIT, Office of GIS Designated State Names Authority for Maine, GIS Coordinator Emily Pettit, Emily.Pettit@maine.gov

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DACF Director of Communications Jim Britt, Jim.Britt@maine.gov

DACF Commissioner's Office and legislative liaison Emily Horton, Emily.K.Horton@maine.gov

DACF, Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning, State Geologist Stephen Dickson, Stephen.M.Dickson@maine.gov

References

[“Secretary Haaland Takes Action to Remove Derogatory Names from Federal Lands,”](#) press release published by the Department of the Interior November 19, 2021.

[“State moves swiftly to remove illegal, racist names from 5 Maine islands,”](#) By Colin Woodard, *Portland Press Herald*, July 20, 2021.

[“Federal board approves removal of ‘Negro’ from more than a dozen place names in Texas,”](#) *Washington Post*, June 10, 2021.

U.S. Board on Geographic Names, [“Principles, Policies, and Procedures,”](#) January 2021.

Congressional Bills 116th Congress, 2d Session, [H.R. 8455](#) Introduced in House “To create a process by which the Board on Geographic Names shall review and revise offensive names of Federal land units, to create an advisory committee to recommend Federal land unit names to be reviewed by the Board, and for other purposes,” September 30, 2020.

Testimony of Representative Donald Soctomah, LD 2418 "An Act Concerning Offensive Names," January 28, 2000.

GNIS Records

MAINE GEOGRAPHIC SITES WHOSE NAMES CONTAIN “NEGRO”

	Gaz ID	Feature Name	Class	County	Elev.	Latitude	Longitude	BGN Decision date	Entry date
1	577637	Upper Negro Island	Island	Hancock County	26	44.4081322	-68.770585	None	09/29/1980
2	572089	Negro Point	Cape	Hancock County	26	44.4064673	-68.3597399	12/31/1927	09/29/1980
3	570524	Lower Negro Island	Island	Hancock County	23	44.4053545	-68.7714183	None	09/29/1980
4	580066	Negro Head	Cliff	Knox County	0	44.0867491	-68.5961349	None	05/31/1991
5	572087	Negro Island	Island	Lincoln County	33	43.8200833	-69.6111569	None	09/29/1980
7	572084	Negro Hill	Summit	Penobscot County	607	45.23867	-68.34174	None	09/29/1980
8	572082	Negro Brook	Stream	Somerset County	1020	45.9158724	-69.726171	None	09/29/1980
9	572083	Negro Hill	Summit	Somerset County	423	44.860895	-69.4153254	None	09/29/1980
10	572085	Negro Island	Island	York County	0	43.364808500	-70.4336616	None	09/29/1980
11	572086	Negro Island	Island	York County	0	43.4570302	-70.3417151	12/31/1891	09/29/1980
12	572088	Negro Island Ledge	Bar	York County	0	43.4609191	-70.3372706	None	09/29/1980

Source: USGS database.

A search in the USGS database for sites bearing names that include the “N-word” brings up the following six lakes, which also appear when searching for sites whose names include the word “Negro.”

MAINE GEOGRAPHIC SITES WITH ALTERNATE NAMES CONTAINING THE “N-WORD”

Gaz ID	Feature Name	Class	County	State	Elevation	Latitude	Longitude	BGN Decision date	Entry date
581544	Pelletier Brook	Stream	Aroostook County	Maine	597	47.0905915	-69.0228168	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
581521	<u>First Pelletier Brook Lake</u>	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1253	47.06021826	-68.90527911	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
575513	<u>Sixth Pelletier Brook Lake</u>	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1270	46.98133672	-68.92530971	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
581549	Second Pelletier Brook Lake	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1257	47.05333049	-68.89816464	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
581545	Pelletier Brook Lakes	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1257	47.0500377	-68.8947643	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
581525	Fourth Pelletier Brook Lake	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1312	47.02816545	-68.88933207	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
581551	Third Pelletier Brook Lake	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1243	47.04619776	-68.88932427000000	12/31/1978	09/29/1980
566143	Fifth Pelletier Brook Lake	Lake	Aroostook County	Maine	1286	46.98048208	-68.88463959	12/31/1978	09/29/1980

Source: USGS database.

Sixth Pelletier Brook Lake
Summary Report

Variant Names

Name ▾ Asc ▾

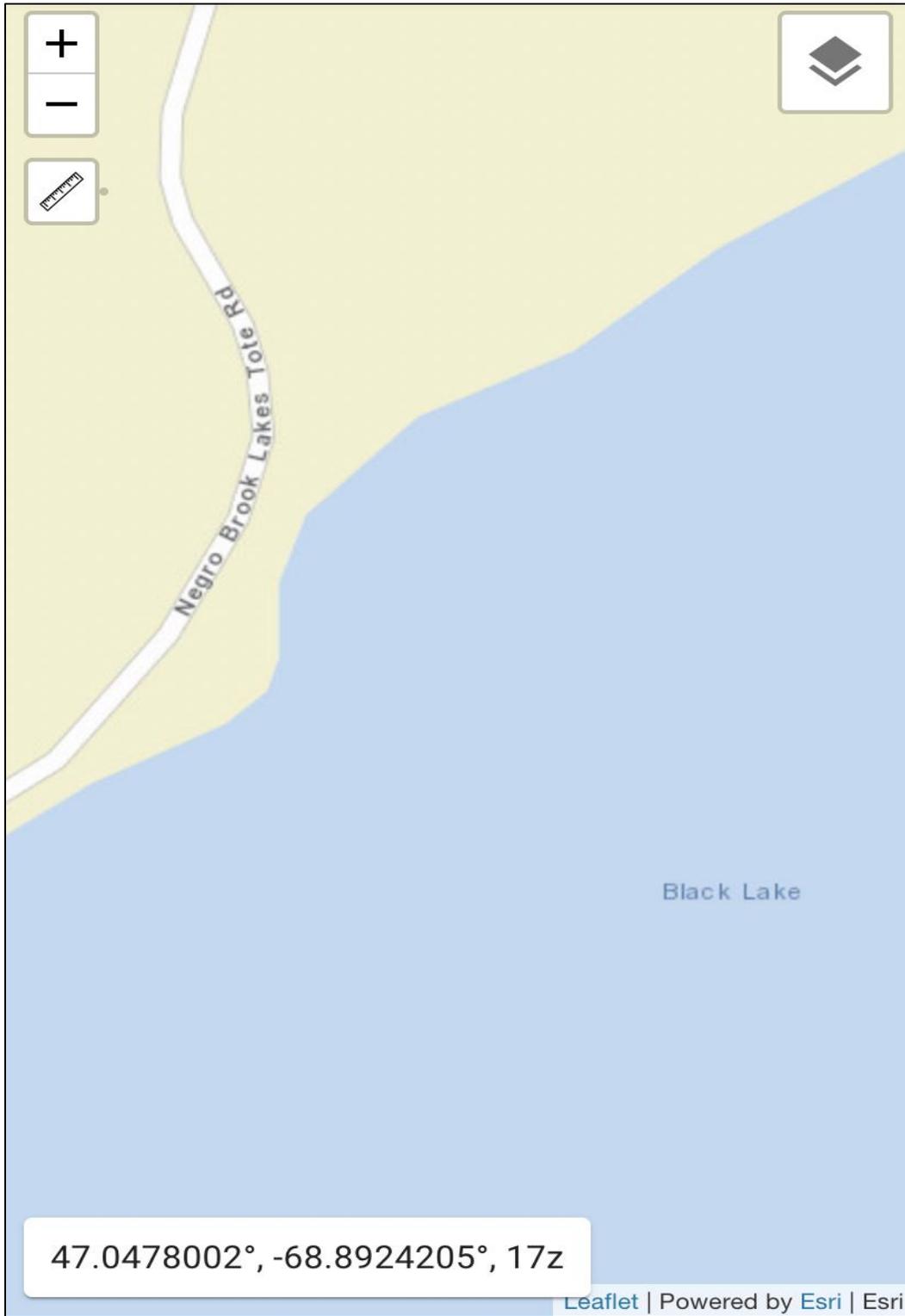
Name	Originator	Reference	Series Name	Publication Date	Source Url	Title	Edition	Notes	Additional Information
Sixth Nigger Brook Lake	U.S. Geological Survey	US	Geographic Names Phase I data compilation (1976-1981)	December 31, 1981	-	-	-	Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files. In some instances, from 1:62,500 scale or 1:250,000 scale maps.	Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files.
Sixth Negro Brook Lake	U.S. Geological Survey	US	Geographic Names Phase I data compilation (1976-1981)	December 31, 1981	-	-	-	Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files. In some instances, from 1:62,500 scale or 1:250,000 scale maps.	Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files.

Decisions

Name	Date	Authority	Type
Sixth Pelletier Brook Lake	January 1, 1979	Board Decision	Official

Source: USGS database.

Pulling away map layers reveals a base map on which one can read “Negro Brook Lakes Tote Road,” “Black Lake,” “Little Black River.”



Source: USGS database.

In the case of Curtis Island, it appears that the USGS approved a name change from “Negro Island” to “Curtis Island” in 1934. However, it is unclear whether the name “Negro Island” was once again published on certain map products in 1981.

Curtis Island									
Summary Report									
Variant Names									
Name ▾ Asc ▾									
Name	Originator	Reference	Series Name	Publication Date	Source Url	Title	Edition	Notes	Additional Information
Negro Island	U.S. Geological Survey	US	Geographic Names Phase I data compilation (1976-1981)	December 31, 1981				Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files. In some instances, from 1:62,500 scale or 1:250,000 scale maps.	Primarily from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (or 1:25K, Puerto Rico 1:20K) and from U.S. Board on Geographic Names files.
Decisions									
Name	Date	Authority	Type						
Curtis Island	January 1, 1934	Board Decision	Official						
Coordinates									
Sequence	Coordinates	Map	State						
1	44.2020235, -69.0497588	Camden	ME						

Source: USGS database.

MAINE GEOGRAPHIC SITES WHOSE NAMES CONTAIN OR FORMERLY CONTAINED THE “S-WORD”

1	Gaz ID	Feature Name	Class	County	Elev.	Latitude	Longitude	BGN Decision date	Entry date
2	562242	Big Moose Mountain	Summit	Piscataquis County	3192	45.48413	-69.7115	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
3	562243	Big Moose Pond	Lake	Piscataquis County	1490	45.45439161	-69.6795308	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
4	1987328	Big Moose Township	Civil	Piscataquis County	1552	45.50481	-69.71661	None	04/25/2003
5	576187	Defence Head	Island	Waldo County	23	44.44365	-68.85994	06/11/2008	09/29/1980
6	576190	Defence Point	Cape	Waldo County	0	44.4459092	-68.8586427	06/11/2008	09/29/1980
7	576189	Epahsakom Island	Island	Washington County	200	45.1884191	-67.6754808	04/09/2008	09/29/1980
8	570078	Little Moose Brook	Stream	Piscataquis County	1303	45.4739353	-69.677834	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
9	570079	Little Moose Mountain	Summit	Piscataquis County	2185	45.44761	-69.68617000	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
10	570080	Little Moose Pond	Lake	Piscataquis County	1536	45.45824277	-69.66803438	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
11	576188	Merrill Isle	Island	Cumberland County	269	43.8370205	-70.4928325	None	09/29/1980
12	571269	Middle Moose Brook	Stream	Piscataquis County	1207	45.4800462	-69.6783897	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
13	576183	Moose Bay	Bay	Piscataquis County	1027	45.5075455	-69.6408892	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
14	576193	Moose Bosom	Summit	Piscataquis County	3022	45.93339000	-69.08581	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
15	576185	Moose Brook	Stream	Piscataquis County	1030	45.4942125	-69.6600562	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
16	576191	Moose Point	Cape	Piscataquis County	1040	45.5897668	-69.6920015	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
17	1987343	Moosehead Junction Township	Civil	Piscataquis County	1647	45.4391	-69.68123	None	04/25/2003
18	576192	Sipun Pond	Lake	Franklin County	1526	45.5296801	-70.615481210	02/07/2001	08/26/2002
19	576186	The Crows Nest	Summit	Washington County	240	44.78147	-67.02276	12/08/2004	08/26/2002
20	577663	Upper Moose Brook	Stream	Piscataquis County	1027	45.50948990 0000000	-69.6528338	09/08/2004	08/26/2002
21	578375	White Squaw Island	Island	Penobscot County	105	45.044787	-68.6658647	None	09/29/1980

Source: USGS database.