

Geographic Names Information System for Nevada by Susan Tingley – Fall 1990 Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Newsletter

The Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology is currently conducting names research and compiling data for Phase II of the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). The GNIS is a computer database developed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to provide accurate and complete information on named geographic entities in the United States and its territories. This database, when complete, will assist in establishing uniform names usage throughout all levels of federal, state, and local government; will provide an index to names used, past and present; and will eliminate duplication of effort by individual agencies compiling their own names layers for use in Geographic Information Systems. The research will also result in the publication by the USGS of the Nevada volume of The National Gazetteer of the United States of America and a digital tape of names information.

The geographic names project consists of two phases. The first phase--a compilation of names printed on USGS 1:24,000-scale topographic maps, where available, or largest scale available if not covered by 1:24,000-scale maps--was completed for Nevada in December 1980. The Nevada database contained 13,598 placename records, including some locational information, at that time. The Phase I compilation is currently available from the USGS as a computer printout or as magnetic media. Starting in October 1987 and continuing to the present, the National Mapping Division of the USGS maintained the Nevada database by adding names from newly published USGS topographic maps and name changes by the U.S. Board of Geographic Names.

Recognizing the need to expand the number and type of sources that were searched for named features and to complete any partial records, the USGS started a second phase of GNIS development and awarded NBMG a contract to complete the work for Nevada. Phase II consists of adding to the database certain categories of information that were skipped during the Phase I compilation and to search new and different source documents. Some of the new sources include names published on USGS topographic maps issued between December 1980 and October 1987 and names from various non-USGS sources (state sources and historic records).

A wide variety of source documents have been or will be reviewed for the Phase II compilation. Included are USGS topographic maps published since Phase I was completed; National Ocean Service lake and river charts; U.S.

Forest Service maps; U.S. Bureau of Standards Directory of Cities (FIPS 55 List); Bureau of Land Management maps; National Park Service maps; Defense Mapping Agency maps; Soil Conservation Service maps; Army Corps of Engineers river navigation charts; historic USGS topographic quadrangle maps; dams and reservoirs list (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers); airport list (FAA); radio and television station lists (FCC); Census of Population list (Bureau of Census); Shopping Center Directory; National Wildlife Refuge brochures and maps; Federal Writers' Project books; U.S. Postal Guide; Official Railroad Guide; National Registry of Natural Landmarks; telephone directories; U.S. Post Office site location reports; Nevada State Highway Department maps (quadrangle maps, state maps, county base maps, historic maps, and tourist maps); lists of churches; lists of schools; grazing status maps; historical maps; commercial atlases and gazetteers; placename books; and research documents.

The typical record includes the name, the kind of geographic entity (stream, summit, range, populated place, spring, well, locale, etc.), location by state and county, location by 7.5' quadrangle name, location and extent by geographic coordinates (latitude/longitude), variant names and variant spellings, and bibliographic reference. The record may also contain elevation, section, township, range, size, physical description, and origin and meaning of the name.

Phase II compilation in Nevada began in September 1989 under the direction of Susan L. Tingley, State Coordinator. Working with her are Professor Terrill J. Kramer of the Geography Department at UNR and seven students. Several other organizations are cooperating in this effort: Nevada Division of State Lands, Nevada Department of Highways, Mackay Mines Library, Nevada Historical Society, Camp Nevada Publishing, Nevada State Library and Archives, and the Nevada State Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

The first months of the project were spent on planning and training. Since November 1989 progress has been steady. Through June 1990, 4,319 new records have been created and 1,303 records have been corrected. By the time the project is completed in the fall of 1991, several thousand additional names will have been searched out and added to the database.

---Susan L. Tingley, Publications Manager