



State of New Hampshire

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

Ken Gallagher, Principal Planner
New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs
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RE: Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Applications to Rename Mt. Washington and Baker River

Dear Ken:

The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) opposes the proposed name change of Mt. Washington to Agiocochook. Mt. Washington is named after George Washington, a person of unique stature in United States history as the celebrated military commander of the revolutionary forces that fought for and won independence from England and also as the exceedingly popular first President of the United States of America. It is no exaggeration to say that he is the most prominent and best known of the several “founding fathers” of our country. Mt. Washington is the highest summit in the northeastern United States and one of several in the White Mountains of New Hampshire that extends well above treeline into the alpine zone. Mt. Washington is the high point of the Presidential Range massif, which features several summits lining its primary alpine ridge that are named after former Presidents of the United States, including founding fathers Jefferson, Adams, and Madison. It also plays host to Huntington Ravine, an internationally popular rock and ice climbing destination, and Tuckerman Ravine, which is the premier backcountry skiing cirque in the northeastern United States and one of the best-known backcountry ski destinations in North America. Every year, Mt. Washington attracts many thousands of hikers, climbers, mountaineers, skiers, snowboarders, auto-road drivers and cyclists, cog railway riders, and other tourists to New Hampshire, especially to the Mount Washington Valley, the Gorham area, and the Carroll/Crawford Notch area. These areas all rely heavily on out-of-state tourism and outdoor recreation for their economic well-being, and Mt. Washington is the most visibly dominant geographical feature in each of these locales. As such, it is no exaggeration to say that Mt. Washington is an iconic natural symbol of the Granite State and is likely its single most nationally and internationally known draw for year-round tourism.

The applicant asserts without any support that: “Allowing the mountain to be named after George Washington indicates federal and cultural approval of the practice of slavery.” DAS

strongly disagrees with the logical leap at the center of that bald assertion. DAS believes that it is possible (indeed, necessary in these modern times) to appreciate and celebrate the more favorable aspects of a prominent historical figure's life while clearly acknowledging and learning from their known shortcomings and faults without endorsing or taking responsibility for them. History has shown that no person or society is perfect. Recent archeological discoveries have suggested that the Abenaki and other native Americans who predated European settlement of North America also may not have been the original or first inhabitants of the continent. While societal attitudes toward slavery in the United States have undoubtedly changed significantly over the past two hundred years, DAS does not believe that Mt. Washington was named after our country's first President as an endorsement of slavery.

Changing the name of Mt. Washington to Agiocochook does not appear to have very much, if any, popular support within the State of New Hampshire. DAS notes from certain supplemental materials received with the name change application that this appears to be the first time an application has been filed to change the name of any geographic feature in the United States named after George Washington, and this particular feature would appear to be the most prominent. DAS also notes that there are many other nearby geographic features, places, tourist attractions, and businesses located within sight of Mt. Washington that are named after it in one way or another. A few that come to mind quickly are: Mount Washington Valley, Omni Mount Washington Resort, Mount Washington Auto Road, Mount Washington Cog Railway, Mount Washington Observatory, and Mount Washington Cruises. Therefore, changing the name of Mt. Washington could cause confusion among tourists and consumers and disassociation of those similarly named places, attractions, and businesses from the highest summit of the nearby alpine massif.

Even though Agiocochook is already an official alternate name for Mt. Washington in the federal Geographic Names Information System, it is by no means in common usage even within the residential communities adjacent to Mt. Washington or among the outdoor sports and recreation communities that mostly frequent the mountain's flanks year-round. In fact, while it is possible to find the name Agiocochook here and there with some effort, it does not even appear to be commonly known among the people of New Hampshire.

DAS has no comment regarding the application to change the name of the Baker River to the Asquamchumauke River.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles M. Arlinghaus
Commissioner