

Guidelines for Hawaiian Geographic Names

The Hawai'i Board on Geographic Names was created by Act 50 of the 1974 Hawai'i State Legislature to assure uniformity in the use and spelling of the names of geographic features within the State. The Board is responsible for designating the official names and spellings of geographic features in Hawai'i. Following the guidance of the United States Board on Geographic Names, standardized spelling of geographic names allows the public to communicate unambiguously about places, reducing the potential for confusion. Because of this, there is only one approved official name for a geographical feature. In the State of Hawai'i, a place may have multiple variant names. In these cases the Hawai'i Board on Geographic Names will submit these variant names to the U.S. Board along with the official name. The Hawai'i Board makes no judgment as to whether an official name or a variant name is the more "appropriate" name. In the late 1990s, the Board began a project to review the spelling of each Hawaiian place name for proper use of 'okina and kahakō, or diacritical marks. More information on this project can be found on the Board's website. In 2014, the Board sought to further standardize and document the decision making criteria used to determine the appropriate use of diacriticals, and developed this style guide as a reference. As the Hawai'i Board on Geographic Names reviews each name that appears on maps and adds the appropriate 'okina and kahakō to Hawaiian place names, the following guidelines shall be used, as appropriate. This guide, and the decisions of the Board are not an indication of principles, but instead are meant to address issues of policy, procedure, methodology and approach. Please note that these guidelines may change over time.

Consult with Knowledgeable Community Members

Whenever possible, appropriate consultation with knowledgeable community members should be incorporated into the discussion and decision making by the Board on Geographic Names. First priority: Native Hawaiian speaking members from the community where the geographic name is located. Second priority: Members from the community where the geographic name is located whose command of the Hawaiian language is reliable. Third priority: Members who were born and raised in the community where the geographic name is located.

Check Resources

Utilize ALL appropriate reference publications as possible to verify geographic names (including proper placement of glottal stops and macrons). Recommended references are attached. Other publications and online resources may be used if those publications cite their source. Should any publication or resource cite "USGS" or anything similar, that information shall not be used. This is to ensure the Hawai'i Board on Geographic Names is not citing its own work, or work from past Boards.

Consider Hawaiian and Common Usage

Geographic names that reflect historical spellings or forms commonly used or preferred by the local population may be considered by the Board on Geographic Names, as long as those names conform to the rules of Hawaiian and/or English. Ascertaining an accurate Hawaiian geographic name based on common usage must be approached very cautiously, especially if the geographic name is based on vocalization. The decrease in the number of native Hawaiian speakers combined with the wide variety of speech sounds can make pronunciation an imperfect source when determining the spelling of a Hawaiian word.

Naming Guidelines

- a. **Geographic names are to be capitalized.**

e.g. Waikāne not waikāne

- b. **Only the initial letter of a geographic name is to be capitalized.** This includes proper nouns within the geographic name.

e.g. Waikāne not WaiKāne

- c. **Geographic names shall be written as one word** unless a *single word* modifier at the end separates an already established place name into two or more geographic regions.

e.g. Kalihi Uka or Kalihi Kai

Any single word modifier of a geographic name shall be capitalized with the geographic name.

e.g. Kalihi Uka not Kalihi uka

Examples of common single word modifiers

Uka - Kai

Pali

One - Two / 1 - 2

Nui - Iki

Waena

Ma kai - Ma uka

Loa - Poko

Luna - Lalo

Loko - Waho

- d. **Compound geographic names shall be written as one word should the initial word be a common noun frequently used to describe geographic features.**

e.g. Pu'umoa not Pu'u Moa

Kīpukanēnē not Kīpuka Nēnē

Examples of commonly used initial words in geographic names

Kīpuka-

Wai-

Pōhaku-

Pu'u-

Kai-

Hale-

Lae-

Lua-

Pali-

In rare circumstances, when a single and specific geographic feature is specially named after an individual, the proper noun shall be written separately from the geographic feature.

e.g. Kīpuka Kapa'ū

Pōhaku 'o Kāne

References for HBGN

- ‘Ahahui ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Spelling Committee. Recommendations of the ‘Ahahui ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i 1978 Spelling Project. 1978.
- Bier, James. Kauai, Hawaii: The Garden Isle [map]. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004 (and previous editions).
- Bier, James Allen. Map of Hawai‘i, the Big Island: Full Color Topographic. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011 (and previous editions).
- Map of Maui, the Valley Isle: Full Color Topographic. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008 (and previous editions).
- Map of Moloka‘i, the Friendly Isle, Lana‘i, the Private Isle: Full Color Topographic. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002 (and previous editions).
- Map of O‘ahu, The Gathering Place: Full Color Topographic. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002 (and previous editions).
- Clark, John R. K. Hawai‘i Place Names: Shores, Beaches, and Surf Sites. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena and Samuel H. Elbert. Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian. Rev. and enl. ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1986.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena, Samuel H. Elbert, and Esther T. Mookini. Place Names of Hawai‘i. Rev. and enl. ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1976.
- Paradise, Thomas R. Atlas of Hawai‘i. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998.
- Sterling, Elspeth P. Sites of Maui. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1998.
- Sterling, Elspeth P. and Catherine C. Summers. Sites of O‘ahu. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1978.
- Summers, Catherine C. Molokai: A Site Survey. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1971.
- Wichman, Frederick B. Kaua‘i: Ancient Place-Names and Their Stories. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998.
- Hawaiian Kingdom and Hawaiian Government Surveys. Collections of the Hawai‘i State Survey Division.
- Interviews, Audio-Recording Collections of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, the University of Hawai‘i, and/or private collection. (Native Hawaiian speakers whose interview is conducted in Hawaiian, who are from the place and/or general location of concern.)

Online resources

- He ‘Ohina Nūpepa ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. nupepa.org
- Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. wehewehe.org.
- Soehren, Lloyd, compiler. Hawaiian Place Names. <http://ulukau.org/cgi-bin/hpn?l=haw>
[To be used for research only, not as an authoritative source on spelling.]

The Board recommends the use of Unicode character U+02BB to write the ‘okina, with Unicode character U+2018 as an acceptable alternative.