

GNIS Feature Classes

06/04/2024

Feature Class	Description
Arch	Natural arch-like opening in a rock mass (bridge, natural bridge, sea arch).
Area	Any one of several areally extensive natural features not included in other categories (badlands, barren, delta, fan, garden).
Arroyo	Colloquial usage in southwestern United States. The valley of an ephemeral stream with a flat floor and steep banks or the ephemeral stream flowing through a valley with a flat floor and steep banks, either hydrographic or hypsographic (draw, wash, gully).
Bar	Natural accumulation of sand, gravel, or alluvium forming an underwater or exposed embankment (ledge, reef, sandbar, shoal, spit).
Basin	Natural depression or relatively low area enclosed by higher land (amphitheater, cirque, pit, sink).
Bay	Indentation of a coastline or shoreline enclosing a part of a body of water; a body of water partly surrounded by land (arm, bight, cove, estuary, gulf, inlet, sound).
Beach	The sloping shore along a body of water that is washed by waves or tides and is usually covered by sand or gravel (coast, shore, strand).
Bench	Area of level to gently sloping land on the flank of an elevation such as a hill, ridge, or mountain where the slope of the land rises on one side and descends on the opposite side (first bottom, flood-plain step, level, terrace, tread).
Bend	Curve in the course of a stream and (or) the land within the curve; a curve in a linear body of water (bottom, loop, meander).
Canal	Waterway, primarily manmade, used by watercraft or for drainage, irrigation, mining, or waterpower (ditch, lateral, sluice).
Cape	Projection of land extending into a body of water (lea, neck, peninsula, point).
Census	A statistical area delineated locally specifically for the tabulation of Census Bureau data (census designated place, census county division, unorganized territory, various types of American Indian/Alaska Native statistical areas). Distinct from Civil and Populated Place.
Channel	Linear deep part of a body of water through which the main volume of water flows and is frequently used as a route for watercraft (passage, reach, strait, thoroughfare, throughfare). Not a Stream or Valley.
Civil	A political division formed for administrative purposes (borough, county, incorporated place, municipio, parish, town, township). Distinct from Census and Populated Place.
Cliff	Very steep or vertical slope on one side (bluff, crag, escarpment, head, headland, nose, palisades, precipice, promontory, rim, rimrock, scarp).
Crater	Circular-shaped depression at the summit of a volcanic cone or one on the surface of the land caused by the impact of a meteorite; a manmade depression caused by an explosion (bowl, caldera, lua, maar).
Crossing	A place at which a river or stream may be crossed (landing, ferry, ford).
Falls	Perpendicular or very steep fall of water in the course of a stream (cascade, cataract, waterfall).
Flat	Relative level area within a region of greater relief (clearing, glade, pan, park, playa lake, salina, upland)
Gap	Low point or opening between hills or mountains or in a ridge or mountain range (col, notch, pass, saddle, water gap, wind gap).
Glacier	Body or stream of ice moving outward and downslope from an area of accumulation; an area of relatively permanent snow or ice on the top or side of a mountain or mountainous area (icefield, ice patch, snow patch).
Gut	Relatively small coastal waterway connecting larger bodies of water or other waterways (creek, inlet, slough).
Island	Area of dry or relatively dry land surrounded by water or low wetland (archipelago, atoll, cay, hammock, hummock, isla, isle, key, moku, rock).
Isthmus	Narrow section of land in a body of water connecting two larger land areas.
Lake	Natural body of inland water (backwater, lac, lagoon, laguna, oxbow, pond, pool, resaca, tank, tarn, waterhole).

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Lava	Formations resulting from the consolidation of molten rock on the surface of the Earth (kepula, lava flow, māwae, traps).
Levee	Natural or manmade embankment flanking a stream (bank, berm).
Military	Place or facility used for various aspects of or relating to military activity.
Pillar	Vertical, standing, often spire-shaped, natural rock formation (chimney, hoodoo, monument, pinnacle, pōhaku, rock tower).
Plain	A region of general uniform slope, comparatively level and of considerable extent; can refer to the flat area of a large mesa (desert, grassland, highland, kula, plateau, savanna).
Populated Place	Place or area with clustered or scattered buildings and a permanent human population (city, settlement, town, village). A populated place is usually not incorporated and by definition has no legal boundaries. However, a populated place may have a corresponding "civil" record, the legal boundaries of which may or may not coincide with the perceived populated place. Distinct from Census and Civil classes.
Range	A single mass of hills or mountains; a complex, interconnected series of mountain ranges having a well-defined longitudinal trend (cordillera, mountain belt, sierra).
Rapids	Fast-flowing section of a stream with turbulent flow, often shallow and with exposed rock or boulders, where discharge is mostly influenced by velocity rather than width and depth (dalles, riffle, ripple).
Reservoir	Artificially impounded body of water (lake, tank).
Ridge	Elevation with a narrow, elongated crest that can be part of a hill or mountain (arête, crest, chenier, cuesta, divide, esker, hogback, mogote, lae, ridge, spur).
Sea	Large body of salt water (gulf, ocean).
Slope	A gently inclined part of the Earth's surface (grade, pitch).
Spring	Place where underground water flows naturally to the surface of the Earth (seep).
Stream	Linear body of water flowing on the Earth's surface (anabranh, awāwa, bayou, branch, brook, creek, distributary, fork, kill, pup, rio, river, run, slough)
Summit	Prominent elevation rising above the surrounding level of the Earth's surface; does not include pillars, ridges, or ranges; can occur as a single isolated mass or in a group (ahu, ballon, berg, bald, butte, cerro, colina, cone, cumbre, dome, head, hill, horn, knob, knoll, mauna, mesa, mesita, mound, mount, mountain, peak, pu'u, rock, sugarloaf, table, volcano).
Swamp	Poorly drained wetland, fresh or saltwater, wooded or grassy, possibly covered with open water (bog, cienega, everglades, fen, marais, marsh, pocosin, slough).
Valley	Linear depression in the Earth's surface that generally slopes from one end to the other (barranca, canyon, chasm, cirque, cove, coulee, draw, fjord, glen, gorge, gulch, gulf, gully, hollow, ravine).
Woods	Small area covered with a dense growth of trees; does not include an area of trees under the administration of a political agency.