

Domestic Geographic Name Report

1 Use this form to recommend a feature name or to suggest a name change.

2. For features on Federal lands, coordinate requests with the agency (U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, etc.) For the administrative area in which the land is located.

3. On the reverse side of this form give information on the local usage and authority for recommended name.

4. For more information about the Geographic Names Information System or the National Gazetteer Program, contact the U.S. Board on Geographic Names at 703-648-4544.

5. Return this form to:

Executive Secretary for Domestic
Geographic Names
U.S. Geological Survey
523 National Center
Reston, VA 22092

Action Requested

Proposed New Name: _____

Application Change: _____

Name Change: X

Other: _____

Recommended Name: North Yuyanq'Ch'ex and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex

State: Alaska

County or Equivalent: Municipality of Anchorage

Administrative Area: Chugach State Park

Specific Area Covered:

Latitude: 61° 02' 16 "N Longitude: 149° 33' 38 "W (North Peak)

Latitude: 61° 01' 46 "N Longitude: 149° 34' 28 "W (South Peak)

Section(s) 13, 23 Township(s) 11N Range(s) 02W Meridian Seward Elevation 5065 ft (N), 5005 ft (S)

Type of Feature (stream, mountain, populated place, etc.): Two mountain peaks

Is the feature identified (including other names), in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)?

Yes X No ___ Unknown _____ If Yes, how is it listed? North Suicide Peak and South Suicide Peak

Description of feature (physical shape, length, width, direction of flow, etc.):

The north peak is 5065 ft tall, and the south peak is 5005 ft tall. Located in the Chugach Range, the two peaks are separated by an approximately 3600 ft NE-SW trending ridge across a saddle at 4000 ft elevation. The peaks are located within Chugach State Park near Rabbit Lake.

USGS Anchorage A-7, 1:63,360, 1960

Maps and other sources using recommended name (including scale and date)

Other Name (Variants)

Maps and other sources using other name or application (including scale and date)

Orth, Daniel J., 1967, Dictionary of Alaska Place Names, USGS Professional Paper 567, Page 925: "Suicide Peak: mountain, 5005 ft, at heads of Rainbow and McHugh Creeks, 17 mi. SE of Anchorage, Chugach Mts; 61 01'50" N, 149 34'25" W, Local name reported in 1951 by USGS."

Name information such as origin, meaning of the recommended name, historical significance, biographic data (if commemorative), nature of usage or application, or any other pertinent information:

Yuyanq'Ch'ex is a Dena'ina word meaning "Heaven's Breath." According to the proposer, the suggested name would describe the geological feature and the windy gap between the peaks. The proposer states that the name was suggested after discussions with Native leaders, governmental leaders, and community members as a name inspiring hope, representing a shark contrast to the current name "Suicide Peak," designated by USGS in 1951. The proposer views the current name "Suicide Peak" as derogatory, disrespectful, and culturally inappropriate.

Is the recommended name in local usage? Yes ___ No X If Yes, approximately how many years? _____

Is there local opposition to, or conflict with the recommended name (as located)?

For proposed new name, please provide evidence that feature is unnamed:

N/A

Additional Information:

William Pagaran/Carry the Cure, Inc. (proposer)

Letters of Support:

Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Eklutna Traditional Council

Tebughna Foundation

UAF/Center for Cross-Cultural Studies

James Kari

Request for Comments sent to:

Alaska State Parks – Ricky Gease, Alaska State Parks Director, endorsed the proposal without further explanation, 03/09/2021.

Alaska State Parks – Matt Wedeking, Division Operations Manager, replied 04/15/2021: "I am not against the name change. I would just request the name be a "variant." My main concern is that search-rescues occur in this area, and it may be confusing to SAR members or the injured to properly relay location."

Municipality of Anchorage

Mountaineering Club of Alaska – Steven Gruhn responded on behalf of the MCA on 04/13/2021: "I'm responding on behalf of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska (MCA) to your request to submit comments to the Alaska Historical Commission on the proposal to rename North Suicide Peak and South Suicide Peak as North Yuyanq'Ch'ex and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex, respectively. The MCA is an Anchorage-based organization comprising approximately 700 members interested in mountaineering and other outdoor-related pursuits in Alaska. The MCA's Geographic Names Committee voted unanimously to oppose the proposal to change the name of the Suicide Peaks for the following reasons pertaining to the pertinent guidelines from the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the Alaska Historical Commission.

- 1) **Evidence of Local Support.** The proponent has several signatures of support, but the vast majority are not from Anchorage, the municipality wherein the Suicide Peaks lie. Consequently, there is no demonstrated evidence of local support. A google search for "South Suicide Peak" + Anchorage yielded 2,630 entries. A similar search for "North Suicide Peak" yielded 1,540 entries. A search for "Yuyanq'Ch'ex" yielded 11 results - each pertaining to the current proposed name change. This is evidence both of overwhelming support for the existing names and a lack of support for the proposed names
- 2) **Local Usage.** There is no evidence that the proposed names have had any local usage. Whereas the name Suicide Peaks (as well as the names North Suicide Peak and South Suicide Peak) has been in common, local use for 70 years, as documented on federal and commercial maps, scores of guidebooks, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and blogs. The website searches mentioned above are also an indication of the strong local usage of the existing names and the comparative lack of local use of the proposed names. Additionally, given the difficulty of pronunciation, the proposed names are unlikely to ever achieve common local usage.
- 3) **Descriptive Name.** While the proposed names might be considered descriptive of the prevalent wind in the area, the existing name Suicide Peaks is also a descriptive name, as in "it would be suicide to attempt to climb them." There have been no known cases of suicides or attempted suicides related to the Suicide Peaks, and the existing names certainly do not encourage, celebrate, or glorify suicide or self-harm. In fact, the implied warning of the existing name might actually cause some ill-prepared adventurers to have second thoughts before rushing off to attempt to climb the peaks. While well-intended, the proposed names do nothing to prevent accidents or injuries. The proposed names seek to solve a problem that is wholly unrelated to the feature.
- 4) **Alaska Native Name.** While the proposed names are, indeed, Alaska Native in origin, they do not meet the criteria set forth in the naming guidelines of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the Alaska Historical Commission. The first criterion is that the proposed names must have documented common local use. The proposed names have no documented local use, much less any documentation of common use. Rather the names are recent inventions intended to supplant names that have been in use for 70 years.
- 5) **Historical Name.** The existing names have been in documented common local use for 70 years. The existing names have appeared on numerous federal and commercial maps and in several guidebooks, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and other publications and are clearly associated with the two Suicide Peaks west of Indian Creek and clearly visible (in favorable weather conditions) from Rabbit Lake. The names are so associated with the area that another (unofficial) related name has been locally adopted for a peak in the same region (Homicide Peak). The existing names are also appropriate because they announce the danger of climbing them to the unprepared. A June 1985 non-fatal accident on North Suicide Peak that resulted in a helicopter evacuation attests to the inherent danger of attempting to climb these peaks. There is no evidence that the proposed names have any documented historic use, any local use at all, nor any common use, to be certain.
- 6) **Name Changes.** The proponent has not provided a compelling reason to change the existing names. While suicide is certainly a problem in Alaska, changing the name of the Suicide Peaks does nothing to prevent this problem and does little to salve the wounds of those whose loved ones have attempted or committed suicide. Additionally, while the proponent has provided numerous signatures, the vast majority of those signatures do not demonstrate local support as they are not from Anchorage residents, who view the peaks daily. Furthermore, the existing names are not derogatory but rather descriptive and cautionary. The existing names are not duplicative because there are no other peaks or mountains named Suicide within Alaska. The proponent has not demonstrated extensive local support for the proposed names. The signatures presented are largely from outside the Anchorage area.
- 7) **Associative Names.** The proposed name has no association with other names in the state. The existing names are associated with nearby Homicide Peak (a 4660-foot summit northeast of the Suicide Peaks in the Indian Creek drainage). While the name Homicide Peak remains unofficial, it has been in widespread local use for decades and has been published in magazines and on commercial maps dating back more than 30 years.
- For the above reasons, the MCA's Geographic Names Committee unanimously objects to the proposal to change both the name of North Suicide Peak to North Yuyanq'Ch'ex and the name of South Suicide Peak to South

Yuyanq'Ch'ex. In addition, an overwhelming majority of comments from MCA members who do not serve on the Geographic Names Committee objected to the proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the proposed name changes. The MCA's Geographic Names Committee looks forward to submitting formal comments on future geographic name proposals."

Joe Stock, an individual member of MCA, replied 03/10/2021: "I endorse the proposed name because returning peaks to their original name is a good idea."

Ann Fienup-Riordan, member of Friends of Chugach State Park, replied 03/17/2021: "I'm writing to lend my support to the proposed name change of North Suicide Peak and South Suicide Peak to North Yuyanq'Ch'ex and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex. The English translation, Heavenly Breathe, eloquently captures my experiences on the peaks, surrounded by mist (when I was much younger). The name "Suicides" has always troubled me, knowing nothing of its origin. What more appropriate name than the Dena'ina original--casting this more as a reclaiming of a name, than a renaming. I've mentioned your proposal to a number of hiking friends, who all agree. Some ask how the name should be pronounced. An online pronunciation guide would be great, not only helping people with this particular name but giving them an insight to Denaina culture generally."

Chugach State Park Citizen Advisory Board – Convened on 04/12/2021 and voted not to endorse the proposal. A letter was submitted dated 04/14/2021: "Thank you for allowing the Chugach State Park Citizen Advisory Board (CSPCAB) to comment on the proposed name change of North Suicide Peak and South Suicide Peak within Chugach State Park to North Yuyanq'Ch'ex and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex. There is no doubt that suicide is a tragic loss for anyone touched by this, and suicide among our Native Alaskan communities is at a much higher rate than our community as a whole. We can all agree this is a problem that needs attention, and solutions. That said, your guidance to the CSPCAB at our March 8, 2021 board meeting was that the request to rename North and South Suicide Peaks to North and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex must meet certain naming criteria as specified by the Alaska Historical Commission in order to be considered. These naming criteria are explicit and apply to this and all requests to name or change names of any geographic feature within Alaska. You requested that the CSPCAB provide comments, with consideration of these naming criteria. The CSPCAB has thoroughly reviewed the Alaska Historical Commission naming criteria and the North and South Yuyanq'Ch'ex name change application. Although the CSPCAB is sympathetic to the request and appreciates the significant effort that went in to the application, we do not believe the application has fulfilled the requirements set forth by the Alaska Historical Commission to approve the name change. The CSPCAB does not support the name change at this time. Specifically, a geographic name must identify one of six name types and address the special considerations provided by the Alaska Historical Commission. Additionally, name change requests must establish a compelling reason for the change, along with local support. Geographic names must identify one of six name types:

1. Local usage name
2. Descriptive name
3. Alaska Native name in common usage
4. Commemorative name
5. Historical name
6. Associative name

Name changes must establish, as appropriate, five criteria to be considered:

1. Current name is derogatory
2. Current name is duplicative
3. Current name is mis-spelled
4. Name change has extensive local support, including local government entities and organizations
5. Property owners of the feature and adjacent to it have been notified and given opportunity to comment

Name Type

Regarding the proposed name change, the CSPCAB found that the name type criteria was only loosely met with a Descriptive Name:

- 1) Local usage. In our review, the CSPCAB did not see evidence that the proposed names have had local usage, whereas, the name Suicide Peaks has been in common, local use for 70+ years, as documented on federal and commercial maps, numerous guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and more recently internet forums. The CSPCAB recognizes that these sources do not always reflect the local usage of Alaska Native names and would consider the name under this type if the applicant could provide documentation of local usage.
- 2) Descriptive names. While the proposed names might be considered a descriptive name of the prevalent wind in the area,

that same wind is not unique to the Suicide Peaks, and is in fact prevalent throughout the Park.

3) Alaska Native names in common usage. While the proposed names are Alaska Native in origin, we did not find that they met the criteria set forth in the naming guidelines of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the Alaska Historical Commission. Specifically, the proposed names must have documented common local use, which is absent.

4) Commemorative name. The proposed names are not commemorative names.

5) Historical name. From the application presented, the CSPCAB could not determine that the proposed name has historical use.

6) Associative names. The proposed name has no association with other names in the area or in Alaska.

Name Change Criteria

The Alaska Historical Commission will consider the following five criteria, as appropriate, for a name change request, from which the CSPCAB has evaluated this application:

1) Although the existing names might be considered insensitive by some, they are not specifically derogatory to a racial, ethnic, gender or religious group.

2) The existing names are not duplicative because there are no other peaks or mountains named Suicide within Alaska.

3) The existing names are spelled correctly.

4) The proponent has not demonstrated extensive local or governmental support for the proposed new names. There are letters of support from Alaska Native organizations. The bulk of signatures presented in the application appear to be largely from outside the Anchorage area with many from internet-based crowdsourcing forums like Change.org with names from across the US. In addition, no government entities or community councils appear to have been contacted or provided support for this proposed change. Letters of support from the Municipality of Anchorage and local community councils would help the application, but none are provided. The owner of the Suicide Peaks is the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, specifically Chugach State Park. They and the Chugach State Park Citizen Advisory Board were first made aware of the proposed name change in a letter from the Alaska Historical Commission on March 2, 2021. To our knowledge, neither the Park nor the CSPCAB were approached to request their support prior to the final stages of the application process. Advance notice to the landowner, as a potential ally in the name change request, would strengthen the application.

5) In our review we did not find evidence that property owners adjacent to the feature, or broader CSP users have been made aware of the proposed name change or been given a chance to comment.

Summary

Suicide is a tragic loss for all involved, with an unfortunate higher prevalence in our Native Alaskan communities. It is a problem that needs attention and solutions. The CSPCAB struggled with whether to consider other social or situational aspects of the application. Ultimately, we elected to exclusively follow the guidance provided to us by Ms. Bittner to focus our efforts and comments on the naming criteria previously established by the Alaska Historic Commission.

The CSPCAB does not believe the application has met the naming criteria provided by the Alaska Historical Commission to change the name of North and South Suicide Peaks. As such, the CSPCAB has voted unanimously at our April 12, 2021 board meeting to deny support of the name change at this time. That said, CSPCAB does support the possibility of a future name change of Suicide Peaks. Such a name change should only be made after thorough community consultation. This should include giving a range of stakeholder groups, government entities and local residents the opportunity to propose alternatives to the current names. In addition, it should provide local citizens ample time and opportunity to comment on any proposed name change. This might include a discussion of the proposed name change at one or more public meetings. Public meetings should only take place after park users and local community councils have been duly notified. The CSPCAB would happily participate in these future discussions at a regular board meeting or at a meeting of an ad hoc committee on geographic names in the Chugach State Park.”

Alaska Native Language Center, UAF

Kenaitze Indian Tribe

Cook Inlet Region, Inc.

William Pagaran

09/24/20

Company or Agency

Address (city, State, and Zip)

Carry the Cure, Inc.

1040 W. Beylund Loop, Palmer, AK 99645

Copy Prepared by (if other than above)

Title

Phone (day)

Date

Judith E. Bittner

SHPO

(907) 269-8700

Company or Agency

Address (city, State, and Zip)

Alaska Department of Natural Resources/Office of History and Archaeology

550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310, Anchorage, AK 99501-3565

Authority for Recommended Name:

Mailing Address and Telephone

Occupation

Years in Area



