

IAU Working Group for Small Body Nomenclature

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021-2022

By international agreement, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) has the responsibility of approving names for small solar-system bodies (SSSB). The Working Group for Small Body Nomenclature (WGSBN) is the body that carries out this charge. The category SSSB includes minor planets (including Near Earth Asteroids and Trans-Neptunian Objects), comets, satellites of minor planets and, in collaboration with the WGPSN, dwarf planets.

This report covers the period 2021 March 28-2022 March 27.

1) WGSBN MEMBERSHIP:

There were 15 WGSBN members during this report period, including 11 voting members and 4 ex-officio members:

Jana TICHÁ - Chair (Czech Republic)
Gareth V. WILLIAMS - Secretary (USA)
Keith NOLL - Vice-Chair (USA)
Yulia CHERNETENKO (Russia)
Julio FERNÁNDEZ (Uruguay)
Daniel W. E. GREEN (USA)
Pamela KILMARTIN (New Zealand)
Syuichi NAKANO (Japan)
Carrie NUGENT (USA)
Donald YEOMANS (USA)
Jin ZHU (China)
Debra M. ELMEGREEN - IAU President, ex-officio
José Miguel RODRIGUEZ ESPINOSA - IAU GS, ex-officio
Rita SCHULZ - Chair of the WGPSN, ex-officio
Peter VEREŠ – new MPC Representative, ex-officio

This list shows that the WGSBN voting membership is well distributed regarding culture, geography and gender. The Organizing Committee of the WGSBN consists of the Chair, Secretary and Vice-Chair.

2) REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

The WGSBN's main task is to approve (or reject) newly proposed minor planet name proposals. The WG members work continually on the approval process using the special web-based voting system maintained by the WG Secretary. Special attention is given to objects having unusual orbits (NEOs, TNOs, Trojans), space mission targets, targets of deep physical studies and so on.

In order to streamline the process from submission of new names, through the approval to publication of approved names, the WGSBN proposed to the IAU that responsibility for publishing and making official the new names of minor planets

should move from the Minor Planet Center to the WGSBN. The IAU Executive Committee approved this proposal during EC #105.

The WGSBN began announcing new names via a new PDF publication "WGSBN Bulletin". The first WGSBN Bulletin was published on 2021 May 14. By 2022 March 27, a total of 17 Bulletins had been published (13 in Volume 1 and 4 in Volume 2). The Bulletins have announced 954 new minor planet names, so far. The total number of named minor planets is now 23132.

The Bulletin has proved to be an effective way to publish newly-approved minor planet names. It has helped to announce new names much faster, as well as helping to decrease a backlog of new name proposals.

A special batch of names was approved in 2021 October for scientists and technical staff who contributed to NASA's Lucy Trojan asteroid mission.

Previous publications of rules and guidelines for names and citation have been imprecise, often leading to members interpreting them differently when considering names and citations. Following extensive discussion within the WG, a new "Rules and Guidelines for Naming Non-Cometary Small Solar-System Bodies" document was published on the WG's website on 2021 December 20. The extensive document is intended to make the naming rules and guidelines much clearer, for both WG members and name proposers, and will be updated as necessary in the future.

The WGSBN also deals with comet naming. The majority of newly-discovered comets are named quickly, by the Comet Names Sub-Committee (Williams & Green) based on information supplied by the Minor Planet Center. Complicated cases are discussed by the WG via e-mail and votes are cast via the web. There have been 70 new names of comets assigned during the report period.

Naming of small solar-system bodies has been an important and publically-visible topic for a long time. It is one of the most useful means of communicating astronomy to the public all over the world. It gives us an opportunity to build connections between science and society, science and various cultures, or science and art.

2022 March 27

Jana Ticha

The Chair of the WGSBN