AGENDA ITEM: Adoption of letter to US Board on Geographic Names regarding proposal to change the name of Squaw Lake, Sierra County.

SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS ATTACHED: ☐ Memo ☐ Resolution ☐ Agreement ☑ Other

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Letter from US BOGN was on 3/3/2015 agenda

FUNDING SOURCE: None
GENERAL FUND IMPACT: No Additional General Fund Impact

OTHER FUND: AMOUNT: $ N/A

ARE ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL REQUIRED? ☐ Yes, -- -- ☑ No

IS THIS ITEM ALLOCATED IN THE BUDGET? ☐ Yes ☑ No

IS A BUDGET TRANSFER REQUIRED? ☐ Yes ☑ No

BOARD ACTION:
☐ Approved
☐ Approved as amended
☐ Adopted
☐ Adopted as amended
☐ Denied
☐ Other
☐ No Action Taken

☐ Set public hearing
For: ______________________

☐ Direction to: ______________#

☐ Referred to: ______________

☐ Continued to: ______________

☐ Authorization given to: ______________

Resolution 2015- _____________
Agreement 2015- _____________
Ordinance ___________________

Vote:
Ayes: _______________________
Noes: _______________________
Abstain: ____________________
Absent: _____________________

☐ By Consensus

COMMENTS:

__________________________________________

CLERK TO THE BOARD ___________________________ DATE _______________
17 March 2015

Lou Yost, Executive Secretary
U.S. Board on Geographic Names
U.S. Geological Survey
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, MS 523
Reston, VA  20192-0523

Subject:  Name change proposal, GNIS: Squaw Lake (FID 267634)

Dear Secretary Yost:

This letter is to comment on the request made by the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California with respect to the renaming of Squaw Lake in Sierra County, California.

We understand that while the word ‘Squaw’ is in today’s world deemed offensive to some, we would remind the board that the name of Squaw Lake in Sierra County dates to the era of the California gold rush and has been in place over 150 years. The lake is a very isolated 4 acre body of water in the Sierra Buttes lakes basin area of Sierra County.

This Squaw Lake is one of many such landmarks so named in California. In his landmark 1947 reference work “California Places Names”, Professor Edwin Gudde of the University of California, Berkeley, writes of the word ‘Squaw’, that “the word has been loosely applied since Gold Rush days and has been a favorite term for place naming. There are very few counties in the state that do not have at least one Squaw Valley, Creek, Canyon, Hill, or Hollow.” He then goes on to list any number of Squaw named sites in Madera, Fresno, Plumas, Humboldt, San Bernardino, and Mendocino Counties, as well as one in Joshua Tree National Monument. He also specifically points out Squaw Valley, Creek, and Peak, in Placer County, an internationally known ski resort that was the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics and a geographical place name that first appears on a 1857 Goddard map.

As such, we would not wish our isolated Squaw Lake targeted for a name change while all others prevail and remain. It seems to this board that any standard for one is good for all. Similarly, offensive is in the eye of the beholder. Some names chosen by tribes for gaming sites in California seem equally curious, like that of the “Fire Water Lounge” in a Humboldt County Indian Casino.

Should all such sites be seriously considered for renaming, we strongly oppose the name “Damalusung” as proposed for the Sierra County site. We disagree with the proponent that this lake is star shaped, but instead is an oval shaped lake. Should any renaming occur, this board would very much like to retain input with respect to any potential renaming and would additionally wish to confer with the Sierra County Historical Society, the Plumas National Forest, and the California State Preservation Officer.
While we recognize this natural water body had a long history prior to the arrival of white Europeans during the California gold rush and is in a region historically occupied seasonally by both the Maidu and Washoe tribes, this lake is a part of today’s Sierra County landscape. We would welcome working with all to fully vet this issue and would ask for no rush to any judgment.

We very much appreciate this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

By: JAMES BEARD, CHAIR
SIERRA COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

CC: Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
Sierra County Historical Society
Forest Supervisor, Plumas National Forest
California State Historic Preservation Officer