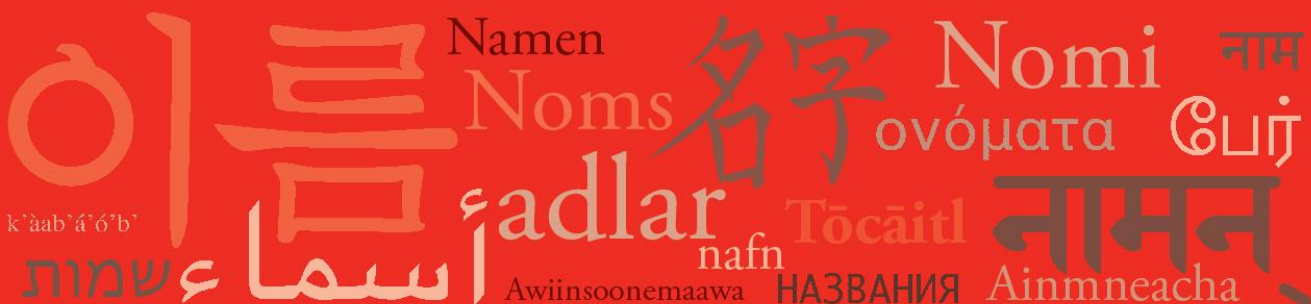


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An Enterprise-Naming Inspiration in the United States: The Geographical Panhandle

Michael D. Sublett

Illinois State University, USA

ans-names.pitt.edu

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Abstract

Enterprises, be they businesses, nonprofit organizations, or organized events, need memorable names to differentiate themselves from other enterprises. In the United States, geographical panhandles have provided a distinguishing word around which to build an enterprise name that appeals to people having affection for or a connection to a particular panhandle. This essay seeks to uncover the extent of the panhandle-naming phenomenon, trace panhandle namegiving back through time, and create a corpus of panhandle-named enterprises. Data collection tools involved standard online searches; Google's predictive searching algorithm; business and nonprofit searching tools on the websites of the states' secretaries of state; and several subscription databases, including Newspapers.com. Florida's panhandle has inspired, thus far, more than 2,400 panhandle-named enterprises, with Texas coming in second, at 1,600. Four other states turned up with more than two hundred each: Idaho, West Virginia, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. In total, the research yielded a from-scratch corpus of just over 6,200 panhandle-named enterprises.

Keywords: enterprise names, namegiving, ergonyms, place names, panhandles, United States

Introduction

Patrolling in 2022 near the Snake River in the northeastern corner of Oregon, a Baker County deputy sheriff noticed a strange bird, which turned out to be a yellow-crowned night heron. Deputy David C. Bailey took some pictures of the heron, and two of his photos ended up on the Baker County sheriff's Facebook page under the caption "Just another beautiful day in the Eastern Oregon Panhandle". Viewers commented on the bird, asked about the exact location, and noted how unusual for Oregon was that species of heron. What no one mentioned was the fact that the panhandle to which the caption referred had disappeared in a 1901 boundary adjustment from what had been a part of adjacent Union County. Local acknowledgement of the old county-boundary panhandle remains, including the *Panhandle Snowmobile Club, Inc.*, out of Halfway, Oregon.¹

A geographical panhandle results from the delimitation of an official boundary and forms a protrusion off the main portion of the delimited unit. None of the US panhandles stand as official land divisions. They are, instead, inventions of humans who find panhandle designation to be helpful as a way of characterizing particular places. These perceptual regions, these boundary salients, these appendages eventually became known as the Oklahoma Panhandle, the Panhandle of Idaho, etc. To their residents and knowing observers, however, they were often just "the panhandle", as in this quip about the Texas Panhandle: "Wayne Cole tells of a man 'come back from up in the panhandle' who said when the wind quit, the chickens all fell over" (Lincoln 2009, 102). Such areas take on their own "spatial identity" as residents exhibit a lasting "collective consciousness" of their locale (Kaplan 2000, 45).

Most geographical panhandles, once created, tend to persist and have for well over a century been inspiring enterprise naming agents across the United States to borrow this descriptive word. By the thousands, namegivers have conferred panhandle nomenclature upon businesses, community-enhancing nonprofits, social clubs, and organized events. This tradition in the United States of naming enterprises after geographical panhandles is the focus of this project. Several questions guided the research. How do the states rank by number of panhandle enterprises? When did the first verifiable panhandle enterprise occur in each state? How common are panhandle enterprise names that begin with "panhandle" or some version of the word? How likely is it that panhandle enterprise names will include the name of the state where the enterprise resides or once resided?

Enterprise names have been the subject of previous contributions to onomastic literature. Boddewyn (1967) looked at the naming of industrial corporations, Walasek (1983) investigated the naming of electric generation companies, and Rami and Arias (2007) foregrounded enterprise names in a portion of eastern Spain. Kryukova (2012) and Pitina (2015) focused on the names of Russian enterprises, what they and others, especially in Europe, refer to as "ergonyms". Kryukova (2012, 41) defined an ergonym as "a proper name referring to any business alliance of people (organizations, societies, political parties, commercial enterprises, etc.)". Her definition, however, does not encompass the numerous panhandle-branded events that I have included in this project's corpus, enterprises such as Idaho's *Panhandle Overland Rally*, Nebraska's *Miss Alliance/Miss Panhandle Beauty Pageant*, and West Virginia's *Pickin in the Panhandle WV BBQ and Bluegrass Festival*. Chen (2015) examined the names of 301 California credit union enterprises. Lombard and

Du Plessis (2016) wrote about cattle ranch names in Montana. Chen (2018) tracked Chinese restaurant names in Los Angeles County, California. Sublett (2019) pointed out enterprises in the US that paid homage to their upstate, downstate, or outstate locations, and later (2021) investigated enterprises named after the US Corn Belt.

Geographical Panhandles

The first known printed reference to “panhandle” or its spelling variants in connection with a US boundary shape occurred in 1840 (table 1). That year a letter postmarked Wheeling, Virginia, claimed presidential candidate William Henry “Harrison [was] going ahead [among potential voters] in this ‘pan-handle’ of Virginia” (Hartford *Courant* 1840).² Second on the list stands Texas. Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was the source of what became the first known reference to the Panhandle of Texas. As the United States Senate debated the slavery-inspired Compromise of 1850, Davis argued that “the claim by Texas to that portion of that country which extends up to the 42nd degree of north latitude, and from which is called, in the expressive language of the people of the western country, the pan-handle, interferes with nothing which ever belonged to New Mexico” (Washington *Union* 1850).

Table 1: First Known References to State-Boundary Panhandles, by Year

State	Year
Virginia (Northern)	1840
Texas	1850
Maryland	1853
Virginia (Eastern)	1862
West Virginia (Northern)	1864
Pennsylvania	1865
Alaska	1867
West Virginia (Eastern)	1868
Idaho	1871
Missouri	1871
Oklahoma	1883
Florida	1889
New York	1892
North Carolina	1893
Nebraska	1894
Utah	1897
South Dakota	1907
New Mexico	1938
Alabama	1948
Mississippi	1948
Connecticut	1955
Tennessee	1999
Illinois	2018

Sources: Primarily newspapers via Newspapers.com.

Note: The Northern panhandles of Virginia and West Virginia are identical, while the Eastern panhandles are different.

States with boundary panhandles in the United States fall into two groups (figure 1). First, there are seven states with pronounced protrusions. Alaska’s panhandle consists of islands and mountains, stretching from Mount St. Elias five hundred miles southeastward, between Canada and the Pacific Ocean.³ Florida’s recreation-focused panhandle lays out at the northern end of the state from east of Tallahassee to west of

Pensacola. Idaho's mountainous northern panhandle, between Montana on the east and Washington on the west, runs all the way to Canada. Nebraska's chunky western panhandle lies north and west of the northeastern corner of Colorado, where stands a fenced-off commemorative marker to that effect. So-called No Man's Land ended up being available to form a panhandle for Oklahoma because Texas forfeited that area in 1850, thereby briefly preserving slavery in the Lone Star State. Texas's 26-county northward-jutting panhandle, between Oklahoma and New Mexico, centers on Amarillo; but Texas's panhandle-branded enterprises often occur far from the neat limits of the 26 counties, south to Lubbock, east to Wichita Falls, and beyond. West Virginia's twin panhandles, the Northern, lying alongside the Ohio River, and the Eastern, lying alongside the Potomac River, gave the state so much panhandle prominence as to inspire its long-running nickname: "The Panhandle State".⁴ Among a second group of states are 11 whose panhandles are comparatively small, exist only in a water body, go by another name, or receive little press. Panhandle references to Massachusetts's Southwick Jog and Minnesota's Northwest Angle apparently have yet to manifest, but both are obvious candidates. For background on the machinations that produced state boundary panhandles, see Linklater (2007), Stein (2011, 2008), and Garthwaite (2016).

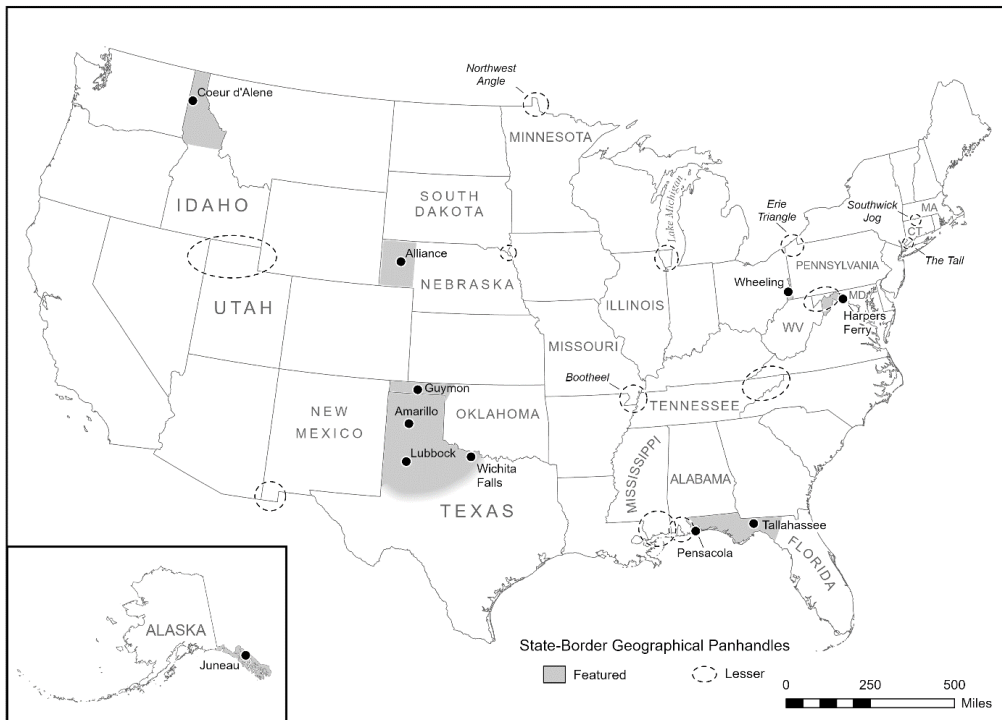


Figure 1: State-Border Geographical Panhandles in the United States, and Selected Cities

County-boundary panhandles sometimes inspire enterprise names, too, like Brown County, Ohio's, *Panhandle Ranch, Inc.* Among other US counties featuring panhandles are Houston, Lee, and Perry, Alabama; Jackson and Prairie, Arkansas; Stanislaus and Yolo, California; Clayton, Georgia; Ford, Jersey, LaSalle, and Montgomery, Illinois; Geary, Kansas; Livingston, Kentucky; Montcalm, Michigan; Choctaw, Mississippi; Shelby, Missouri; Park, Montana; and Lancaster, South Carolina. The first known printed use of "panhandle" in connection with a county boundary came in an 1859 newspaper article, after the Illinois General Assembly created Ford County, the last of the state's 102 organized counties.⁵

Panhandles also have affected the spatial layout of other US entities. Examples include civil-political townships, like Pennsylvania's Springfield Township in Montgomery County and Tredyffrin Township in Chester County; municipalities like Wyoming, Michigan, and Los Angeles, California; the public school

district serving Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Panhandle Park in San Francisco, California; the Grisham police district of Chicago, Illinois; and California's decommissioned El Toro US Marine Corps Air Station. Even a meander loop of the Kentucky River in Kentucky, the shoreline of Green Lake in New York, and the proposed Fourth Congressional District of Iowa in 1862 have presented configurations that led map observers to assign a panhandle label.

Methodology

While others have pursued the origins and geopolitical implications of panhandles, the focus here is on US enterprises with "panhandle" or some version of the word in their names.⁶ When I began this project, I knew of only one panhandle enterprise: the natural gas pipeline business *Panhandle Eastern Corporation*. The corpus that I created for this project consists of *Panhandle Eastern* plus several thousand other panhandle enterprises.⁷ I ended my enterprise searches in 2024, but the fielding of enterprises named panhandle continues.

This essay does not explore two other meanings of panhandle. I exclude here almost every enterprise that focuses on the actual handles of pans that we use to cook food. Such an excluded panhandle enterprise might be a store selling cooking paraphernalia or a restaurant. In a few cases, where a restaurant with a panhandle name is or was operational in a geographical panhandle, however, I have decided to include said enterprise. This cooking/heating-device application of the word is, of course, where namegivers got the idea of likening a geographical area to the handle of a pan (Hale 2023). I also exclude enterprises that seem to stem from the verb version of panhandle, meaning to beg for money from passersby.

In this project, panhandle enterprises include for-profit businesses, not-for-profits, and panhandle-branded events. To qualify for corpus inclusion an enterprise must have one or more people associated with it who make its decisions. The decision authority could be a single owner-operator, two or more partners, a board of directors, or some other management unit.

In the corpus, I include what states variously refer to as fictional names, assumed names, or DBA (Doing Business As) names. Fictional names allow enterprises to slough off suffixes like LLC and Inc. They also allow an owner who has registered a business in their name to shield that name if they choose. In cases where the fictional name and the actual name of an enterprise contain a variant of "panhandle", I include both names. I do not include, however, unofficial nicknames for enterprises, names that outsiders have chosen to use in reference to the enterprise.

I list in the corpus successive names for the same enterprise when these names contain "panhandle" or some variant thereof. For example, *Panhandle Home Service and Repair, LLC*, recently operated out of Chipley, Florida, a name to which that business switched in 2018. I also list this enterprise's predecessors: *Panhandle Auto Center, LLC* (2011–2013) and *Panhandle Auto Center & Home Repairs, LLC* (2013–2018). Likewise, I list all four names of the principal institution of higher learning in the Oklahoma Panhandle: *Panhandle Agricultural Institute* (1909–1921), *Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College* (1921–1967), *Oklahoma Panhandle State College of Agriculture and Applied Science* (1967–1974), and *Oklahoma Panhandle State University* (1974 to present) (Oklahoma Panhandle State University 2024). On the other hand, I ignore contemporaneous spinoff enterprise names when it is obvious that such a name would not exist (like Nebraska's *Panhandle Humane Society Foundation*) without the original parental name, which I do list (*Panhandle Humane Society* out of Scottsbluff).

If an enterprise has registered to conduct business in multiple states, I list it only in its headquarters state. So, Texas claims *Panhandle Eastern*. If a business's name (like *Panhandle Properties*) appears in connection with more than one state and there is no clear connection between/among them, I list each for its appropriate state.

What about spatially extensive panhandle units, such as a health district or a natural gas field? Again, I reverted to the decision rule that I mentioned above: If a panhandle-branded enterprise has a guiding hand, then it joins the corpus. Therefore, school, health, militia, and library districts made the cut because all have or had a governing structure; but a natural gas field and a census district did not.

I have omitted what clearly are products. *Panhandle Magazine*, a publication of News Channel 10 out of Amarillo, Texas, is such an omitted product. So, too, is *Pride of the Panhandle Bread*, once baked in Guymon, Oklahoma.⁸

My systematic searches to identify corpus-worthy enterprises with a panhandle designation utilized many online sources. I began searching via Google and Bing, by state, using as my prompts "Alabama Panhandle", "Alaska Panhandle", "Arizona Panhandle", and so on. and then "Panhandle of Alabama", "Panhandle of Alaska", and so on. Next, knowing that a Google Search (as does Bing) offers predictions of what the user is seeking, I entered "Panhandle A" in the Google search box to see what enterprises came up in the list of predictions. "Panhandle B" went in next, on through "Panhandle Z". Then, I turned to "Panhandle

Aa", "Panhandle Ab", "Panhandle Ac", all the way to "Panhandle Zz". Finally, to shorten the process, I performed three-letter Google prediction searches that featured vowels only in the second place, like "Panhandle Aaa" and "Panhandle Aab" to "Panhandle Zyz". Searches utilizing predictions proved to be extremely slow; but the tactic yielded enterprises that I likely would not have found otherwise, such as Florida's *Panhandle Custom Rods*, which came up when I searched "Panhandle Cus".

Even though these internet searches added to the corpus hundreds of panhandle enterprises, I knew that the key to turning hundreds into thousands would be the information that the secretaries of state (SOS) for all states make available to the public. States (called commonwealths by Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) typically desire more enterprises, especially profit-seeking, tax-generating businesses. So, all 50 states (and the District of Columbia) offer a business search function on their SOS website. At these websites, interested parties can learn what their predecessors have named their enterprises and gather other useful information.

Many of the SOS search tools incorporate a "contains" function. A key word ("panhandle" in this case) in a "contains" SOS site can occur anyplace in an enterprise title; and the search will find it, as it did for *Idaho Panhandle Practical Shooting Club, Inc.* West Virginia makes "contains" searches possible if the user inserts the % symbol immediately before and after the search term, like this: %panhandle%. In nine states, however, the key word must be the first word in the enterprise name (ignoring the articles a, an, and the). The nine without a "contains" function serve Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Utah, and Wisconsin. Lack of a "contains" function for eight of the nine was not a big concern. For Florida, however, with more panhandle enterprises than the other eight combined, lacking it was a significant impediment that demanded informed guessing as to how Florida namegivers might fold panhandle into their enterprise names, other than as the first word. "Florida Panhandle" or "FL Panhandle" were obvious and useful prompts, as were "Central Panhandle" and "Pensacola Panhandle". No doubt, some Florida enterprises slipped through when the key word lay buried too deeply in the name. Fortunately, many panhandle namegivers in Florida opted to begin with "Panhandle".

Looking for enterprise names (and the names of obscure geographical panhandles), I turned next to several databases. Through library subscriptions, the following proved helpful: Accessible Archives, Agricola, Agricultural and Environmental Science, American Antiquarian Society, American Periodicals, America's Historical Newspapers, ArticleFirst, Chicago Defender, Chicago Tribune, Dissertations & Theses Global, Ebook Central, Foreign Broadcasting Information Service, GEOBASE, HeinOnline, JSTOR, Nineteenth Century Collections Online, and Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers. I consulted the U.S. Board on Geographic Names database and found there some places carrying the panhandle name. Finally, I focused via a personal subscription to Newspapers.com on references to US panhandles and on enterprises by name that I already had in the corpus. During the Newspapers.com investigation, I found numerous unforeseen panhandle-branded enterprises and added them to the corpus.

Results

The from-scratch corpus that I created for this project contains the names of 6,209 panhandle enterprises, spread over 46 of the 50 states (table 2). Most of the enterprises, 5,698 of 6,209, or 91.77 percent, are from the seven that I listed above as the featured group of geographical panhandle states: Alaska, Florida, Idaho, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and West Virginia. A pair of these panhandle states, Florida and Texas, account for 4,054 of the 6,209, or 65.29 percent. Florida alone has 2,454 enterprises in the corpus, nearly two-fifths (39.52 percent) of the grand total. Even though a state may not have a border panhandle, the term seems to resonate well with namegivers across the US. Sometimes a local community or other entity named "Panhandle" lends its name to a business or a not-for-profit. Now and then, there is no obvious reason to pick out this word as an enterprise-naming inspiration.

Table 2: Number of Panhandle Enterprises for each State, by Total in Each

State	Enterprises	State	Enterprises
Florida	2,454	Virginia	8
Texas	1,600	Washington	8
Idaho	557	Maryland	6
West Virginia	531	North Carolina	6
Nebraska	268	Oregon	6
Oklahoma	263	Missouri	5
Delaware	89	Arizona	4
Georgia	61	Iowa	4
Alabama	42	Kentucky	4
Pennsylvania	31	New York	4
Kansas	30	Arkansas	3
Alaska	25	Connecticut	2
California	22	Montana	2
Ohio	21	New Jersey	2
Illinois	18	Utah	2
Nevada	17	Maine	1
Colorado	15	Massachusetts	1
New Mexico	14	Minnesota	1
Michigan	13	New Hampshire	1
Wyoming	13	North Dakota	1
Indiana	11	South Dakota	1
Louisiana	11	Hawaii	0
Tennessee	11	Rhode Island	0
Mississippi	10	Vermont	0
South Carolina	10	Wisconsin	0
		Total	6,209

Delaware stands in the seventh position among the states in table 2, but Delaware has no geographical panhandle nor any county or other minor boundaries that would explain its high standing. The reason for Delaware’s rank lies in the fact that for many years Delaware has been a favorable place for out-of-state enterprises to register their existence due to Delaware having a history of being good for business. Of the 89 panhandle enterprises in Delaware, only three listed a Delaware headquarters (always Wilmington). I was able to confirm a company presence in another state for 19 others—most frequently in Texas. Four Delaware enterprises even used *Texas* or *TX* in their enterprise names: *The Texas Panhandle Development Company*; *Texas Panhandle Power Partners I, LP*; *Texas Panhandle Trucking Company, Inc.*; and *DCTN3 430 Panhandle TX, LLC*.

Several states rank relatively high in table 2 because of what I call a panhandle shadow. They stand next to states with strong panhandle naming traditions and have more panhandle enterprises than likely would a state without such a shadow. Georgia (with 61 panhandle enterprises, including *Panhandle Getaways, LLC*) and Alabama (with 42, including *ERS of Alabama and the Panhandle*) border Florida’s powerhouse panhandle. Pennsylvania (at 31), many of which are/were between Pittsburgh and the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia, relate directly to that northward projection or indirectly through an old railroad nicknamed Panhandle. Kansas, with 30 panhandle enterprises, borders much of the north side of the Oklahoma Panhandle and is only the width of that panhandle from the Texas Panhandle. Ohio, Colorado, New Mexico, Washington, and Wyoming are among other states with a naming shadow seeming to affect their rankings in table 2. Knowing precisely why a namegiver in a shadow state chose to use panhandle in an enterprise name is beyond the scope of this project. We can speculate, however, that naming authorities wanted their enterprise’s name to convey the character of the nearby panhandle, hoped to draw patrons from across the state boundary, or perhaps had lived in the panhandle and felt an affinity for the name itself. New Mexicans, for instance, by the early 1880s, had picked up on their eastern plains’ cattle connection with the Texas Panhandle. J. S. Duncan likely borrowed from Texas to name his *Panhandle Corral* in East Las Vegas; and the Green family may have done the same for their *Panhandle Restaurant* in Las Vegas (Las Vegas [New Mexico Territory] Daily Gazette 1880, 1881).

Table 3 provides the name of the first verifiable panhandle enterprise in each state, for each of the 46 states having such an enterprise. Georgia can claim the honor of the oldest known panhandle enterprise, *Panhandle Post Office*, in place south of Atlanta at least by 1838 (Washington [District of Columbia] *Globe* 1839). The rationale for that naming decision is a mystery; but not a mystery is the name of the first panhandle enterprise for the second state on the table 3 list, West Virginia. Brooke County's *Panhandle Post Office* stood near the northern tip of that state's Northern Panhandle (Wheeling [West Virginia] *Daily Intelligencer* 1866). Pennsylvania can claim the oldest business to carry officially a panhandle name, the *Pan Handle Railway Company*. That firm existed briefly in 1868 as a replacement for the Pittsburgh & Steubenville Railroad before merging with two other railroads to form the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railroad (Alexander 1947, 25).⁹

Table 3: First Panhandle Enterprise, by State and Year of Implementation or First Print Record

State	Year	State's First Panhandle Enterprise
Georgia	1838*	<i>Panhandle Post Office</i>
West Virginia	1866	<i>Panhandle Post Office</i>
Pennsylvania	1868	<i>Pan Handle Railway Company</i>
Texas	1875	<i>Pan-Handle Land and Irrigation Company</i>
New Mexico	1880*	<i>Panhandle Corral</i>
New York	1882	<i>Panhandle Land and Cattle Company</i>
Indiana	1885*	<i>Panhandle School District</i>
Kansas	1885	<i>Kansas and Panhandle Railroad Company</i>
Kentucky	1885*	<i>Panhandle Precinct</i>
Oklahoma	1889*	<i>Panhandle Townsite Company, Inc.</i>
California	1890*	<i>Panhandle Improvement Company</i>
Illinois	1894*	<i>Panhandle School District</i>
Michigan	1897*	<i>Panhandle Stave Company</i>
Missouri	1897	<i>Panhandle Cattle Company</i>
Washington	1897	<i>Panhandle Gold and Copper Mining Company</i>
Idaho	1899	<i>Panhandle Mining and Milling Company</i>
Ohio	1901	<i>Columbus Panhandles Football Team</i>
North Carolina	1903*	<i>Panhandle School District</i>
Delaware	1912	<i>Panhandle Mineral & Oil Company</i>
Nebraska	1913	<i>The Panhandle Circuit of County Fairs</i>
Oregon	1921	<i>Panhandle Rodeo</i>
Arizona	1925	<i>Panhandle Oil Company of Arizona</i>
Louisiana	1928	<i>Panhandle Carbon Company, Inc.</i>
Alaska	1941	<i>Panhandle Bar and Café</i>
Florida	1957	<i>Florida Panhandle Corporation AND Panhandle Athletic Conference</i>
Alabama	1972	<i>Panhandle Sport Parachute Club, Inc.</i>
Mississippi	1977*	<i>Panhandle Water Association, Inc.</i>
Connecticut	1984	<i>Panhandle-Hugoton Energy, LP</i>
New Jersey	1985	<i>Panhandle Developmental Oil Drilling, LP</i>
Maine	1987	<i>Tomhegan Panhandle Landowners Association, Inc.</i>
Maryland	1988	<i>Panhandle Realty Corporation</i>
New Hampshire	1989	<i>Panhandle Productions</i>
Massachusetts	1991	<i>Panhandle Limited Partnership</i>
South Carolina	1991	<i>Panhandle Packaging, Inc.</i>
Tennessee	1991	<i>Panhandle Outpatient Diagnostic Center, LP</i>
Colorado	1993	<i>Panhandle Northern RR, LLC</i>
Nevada	1996	<i>Panhandle Ag Chemicals Limited</i>
Wyoming	2002	<i>Panhandle, LLC</i>
Iowa	2004	<i>Pan Handle Investments, LLC</i>
Virginia	2005	<i>Culpepper Panhandle Development Company, LLC</i>
Minnesota	2010	<i>Panhandle Candle and Gift Company</i>
Montana	2011	<i>Panhandle Horizons</i>
North Dakota	2014	<i>Panhandle Consulting & Inspection, LLC</i>
Utah	2018	<i>Panhandle Property and Real Estate Acquisitions, LLC</i>
South Dakota	2022	<i>Panhandle Transport, LLC</i>

Note: An * after a year means that the enterprise came into existence at least by that year. Hawaii, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin had no panhandle enterprises. Oregon's 1921 *Panhandle Rodeo* took its name from Union County's panhandle that I mentioned at the outset of this essay.

The first Texas enterprise with a panhandle handle, *Pan-Handle Land and Irrigation Company*, founded in 1875, was likely also mainly a paper entity, a business whose principals wanted to build canals

across the Texas Panhandle (Galveston [Texas] Daily News 1875). Not paper-only entities were the three *Panhandle School Districts* that provided the first known panhandle enterprises for the states of Indiana (1885), Illinois (1894), and North Carolina (1903). Rather late to join the list, given its first-place ranking in panhandle enterprise numbers of all the states today, was Florida in 1957, with *Florida Panhandle Corporation* and *Panhandle Athletic Conference*.

Slightly more than four of every five (82.06 percent) panhandle enterprise names across the US begin with “panhandle” or some variation of that word (Table 4). State percentages range from 0 for Maine to 100 percent for 17 states. Among the 17, Illinois has the most at 18, with enterprises like *Panhandle Community Unit School District 2* (headquartered in Raymond) and *Panhandle Drafting, LLC* (in Urbana).¹⁰ Of the half dozen states reporting more than a hundred total panhandle enterprises each, Idaho (91.92 percent), Florida (91.36 percent), and Nebraska (88.81 percent) evidence a strong propensity for naming enterprises with panhandle as the initial word. By so doing, perhaps those namegivers were expressing faith that no one would confuse their prominent panhandle with that of any other state. Namegivers in Texas, on the other hand, were less likely (77.19 percent) to use “panhandle” as the first word, often instead introducing first “Texas” in the enterprise’s name—for example, *Texas Panhandle Library System*. West Virginia (39.92 percent) falls well below even Texas among the top panhandle enterprise states when it comes to using panhandle as the first word of enterprise names. Because their state has two distinct state boundary panhandles, namegivers for West Virginia enterprises seem to have felt strongly the need to distinguish between the two panhandles by adding “Eastern” or “Northern” at the beginning of panhandle enterprise names, as in, for instance, Martinsburg’s *Eastern Panhandle Sharpening Service*, Harpers Ferry’s *Eastern Panhandle Cotillion Club, Inc.*, Wheeling’s *Northern Panhandle Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Inc.*, and Weirton’s *Northern Panhandle Medical Supply, Inc.*¹¹

Table 4: Number and Percentage of Enterprise Names that Include the Name of the State, by State
A: Number of Enterprise Names with Panhandle or Variant in Their Names
B: Number of Enterprise Names Beginning with Panhandle or Variant
C: Percentage of Enterprise Names Beginning with Panhandle or Variant

State	A	B	C	State	A	B	C
Alabama	42	34	80.95	Nevada	17	16	94.12
Alaska	25	19	76	New Hampshire	1	1	100
Arizona	4	4	100	New Jersey	2	2	100
Arkansas	3	3	100	New Mexico	14	13	92.86
California	22	13	59.09	New York	4	4	100
Colorado	15	13	86.67	North Carolina	6	6	100
Connecticut	2	2	100	North Dakota	1	1	100
Delaware	89	71	89.87	Ohio	21	14	66.67
Florida	2,454	2,242	91.32	Oklahoma	263	224	85.17
Georgia	61	47	77.05	Oregon	6	6	100
Idaho	557	512	91.92	Pennsylvania	31	27	87.1
Illinois	18	18	100	South Carolina	10	8	80
Indiana	11	10	90.91	South Dakota	1	1	100
Iowa	4	3	75	Tennessee	11	8	72.73
Kansas	30	25	83.33	Texas	1,600	1,235	77.19
Kentucky	4	4	100	Utah	2	2	100
Louisiana	11	7	63.64	Virginia	8	3	37.5
Maine	1	0	0	Washington	8	7	87.5
Maryland	6	6	100	West Virginia	531	212	39.92
Massachusetts	1	1	100	Wyoming	13	12	92.31
Michigan	13	8	61.54	United States	6,209	5,095	82.06
Minnesota	1	1	100				
Mississippi	10	7	70				
Missouri	5	3	60				
Montana	2	2	100				
Nebraska	268	238	88.81				

Note: Among the variants in enterprise names are *Pan Handle*, *Pan-Handle*, *PANhandle*, *Panhandles*, *Panhandler*, *Panhandlers*, *Panhandle's*, *Panhandlegirl*, and *Pnhndl*.

Texas ranks first of the 46 states in terms of total naming instances (210 of 1600 or 13.13 percent) when it comes to including the state's name or the postal abbreviation anywhere in the name of their enterprise (table 5). Perhaps Texas namegivers included the state name because of a desire to avoid confusion with the adjacent Oklahoma Panhandle or simply because of Texan pride in their panhandle when choosing names like *DogWatch of the Texas Panhandle*, *Northwest Texas-Panhandle Interscholastic League*, and *Panhandle Cattle Company of Texas*. Oklahoma lagged well behind Texas in number of enterprises (only 29, or 11.03 percent) having Oklahoma in their names. Examples include nonprofits like *Democrats of the Oklahoma Panhandle* and *Northwest Oklahoma Panhandle Amateur Rodeo Association* and businesses like *Oklahoma Panhandle Energy Cartel, Inc.* and *Panhandle Stages of Oklahoma*. Considerably more than half of the 46 panhandle enterprise states, however (30, or 65.22 percent), did not field a single panhandle enterprise containing their state's name.

Table 5: Number and Percentage of Enterprise Names that begin with Panhandle or a Variant, by State
A: Number of Enterprises with Panhandle or Variant in Their Names
B: Number of Enterprise Names that Include the Name of the State
C: Percentage of Enterprise Names that Include the Name of the State

State	A	B	C	State	A	B	C
Alabama	42	2	4.76	Nevada	17	0	0
Alaska	25	5	20	New Hampshire	1	0	0
Arizona	4	1	25	New Jersey	2	0	0
Arkansas	3	0	0	New Mexico	14	1	7.14
California	22	0	0	New York	4	1	25
Colorado	15	0	0	North Carolina	6	0	0
Connecticut	2	0	0	North Dakota	1	0	0
Delaware	89	0	0	Ohio	21	1	4.76
Florida	2,454	131	5.34	Oklahoma	263	29	11.03
Georgia	61	1	1.64	Oregon	6	0	0
Idaho	557	24	4.31	Pennsylvania	31	2	6.67
Illinois	18	0	0	South Carolina	10	0	0
Indiana	11	0	0	South Dakota	1	0	0
Iowa	4	0	0	Tennessee	11	0	0
Kansas	30	2	6.67	Texas	1,600	210	13.13
Kentucky	4	0	0	Utah	2	0	0
Louisiana	11	0	0	Virginia	8	0	0
Maine	1	0	0	Washington	8	0	0
Maryland	6	0	0	West Virginia	531	40	7.53
Massachusetts	1	0	0	Wyoming	13	0	0
Michigan	13	1	7.69	United States	6,209	407	7.52
Minnesota	1	0	0				
Mississippi	10	0	0				
Missouri	5	0	0				
Montana	2	0	0				
Nebraska	268	17	6.34				

Note: I do not count here the four Delaware enterprises with Texas in their names, one Nevada enterprise with Florida in its name, two Oklahoma enterprises with Texas in their names, one Tennessee enterprise with Florida in its name, one West Virginia enterprise with Ohio in its name, or three Texas enterprises with Oklahoma in their names.

Summary and Discussion

Early on, I posed some enterprise-naming questions to guide me. State rankings “by number of panhandle enterprises” dropped from Florida’s 2,454 (and still adding) to just one for Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The “first verifiable panhandle enterprise in each state” ranged from at least as early as 1838 for Georgia to 2022 for South Dakota, with four states having no known panhandle enterprises. Georgia was one of 16 states recording their first such enterprises in the nineteenth century and South Dakota one of nine with its first in the twenty-first century. The other 21 states began the tradition in the twentieth century. I looked at how common have been “panhandle enterprise names that

begin with ‘panhandle’ or some version of the word”. Florida and Idaho namegivers have done so more than 91 percent of the time (2,242 of 2,454 and 512 of 557, respectively), while the national outcome on this question amounted to more than 82 percent (5,095 of 6,209). Namegivers were much less likely to “include the name of the state where the enterprise resides or once resided” than they were to begin the name with “panhandle”. Only 467 of the 6,209 (7.52 percent) panhandle enterprises in the corpus contained the name or postal code of their home states.¹² With 210 such state-named enterprises, Texas at 13.13 percent was the pacesetter (though a few minor panhandle-enterprise states showed higher percentages).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that “panhandle” is “originally and chiefly US”, but that origin has not hindered worldwide diffusion of the term (OED 2023). Earliest written reference to a panhandle outside of the US appears to be a 1902 mention of the Zamboanga Panhandle on the Philippine island of Mindanao (US Department of War 1902, 560).¹³ Later written references to panhandles involved Afghanistan, Angola, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Laos, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, the Netherlands, Spain, Tajikistan, Tanganyika, and the United Kingdom. Panhandle terminology has even reached the cosmos. Forecasting the position of the planets in the summer of 1982, *The Science Teacher* shared this information with its readers: “Venus goes 37° east, from Taurus, through the northern ‘panhandle’ of Orion July 19–20, into Gemini” (Victor & Pon 1982, 30).

What might constitute logical extensions of the research that I discuss here? That ergonyms/enterprise names deserve continued attention from onomastic scholars should be obvious. One could delve more deeply in the US into the thinking that led namegivers to choose “panhandle” as a key component of their business, nonprofit, or event names. I asked numerous namegivers via email about the naming process, and I got some responses. My thinking is that one could obtain much more information by making telephone inquiries or by interviewing decision makers in person, focusing, say, in a panhandle-conscious place like Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, or Panama City, Florida. With respect to the number of panhandle enterprises per state, one could use state and panhandle area populations to see which states, per capita, have been more inclined or less inclined to go with a panhandle name for their enterprises. A quick look at the total populations of the seven featured panhandle enterprise states reveals that the most panhandle-prone state among the seven is West Virginia, with exactly 30 enterprises in the corpus per 100,000 population (US Department of Commerce 2024). Idaho was second with 27.82/100,000. Florida at 10.49 and Texas at 5.11 lagged well behind the per capita leaders. Calculation of per capita enterprises using population totals in just the panhandles themselves, however, would be more difficult because of uncertainty as to where to draw the in-state boundary of several panhandles—for example, in Florida, Idaho, Texas, and eastern West Virginia. Along the panhandle pathway, I came to believe that alliteration plays a role in namegiving. I have a hunch that words beginning with “P” have taken on a proportionally larger role in the names of panhandle enterprises than have words beginning with other letters. The question would be: Did namegivers tend to choose a “P” word, as in Alaska’s *Panhandle Powerboats, LLC*, to complement “Panhandle” when a word starting with some other letter would have sufficed? Beyond the US, I wonder if namegivers in any of the other panhandle countries that I mention above have incorporated panhandle or its local equivalent in enterprise names associated with, for instance, the Cheshire Panhandle (United Kingdom), the South Limberg Panhandle of the Netherlands, or the Okavango Panhandle (Botswana). More generally, one could examine enterprise naming practices around the world to see where and how namegivers draw inspiration from the local landscape, physical or cultural, when devising enterprise names. Are there Barrier Reef businesses in Australia, Sahel-inspired nonprofit names across northern Africa, or festivals celebrating the Andes in South America?

Notes

¹ Baker County Sheriff’s Department, “Just another beautiful day in the Eastern Oregon Panhandle”, Facebook, September 17, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/posts/100064434892363>; Becky Kaaen, Correspondent, email messages to author, February 13, 2023.

² Wheeling, Virginia, became Wheeling, West Virginia, on June 20, 1863, when West Virginia gained statehood status.

³ Occasionally, there occurs a panhandle reference to southwestern Alaska. See, for instance, a 1915 review that mentions “the Aleuts of the southwestern panhandle” (*Journal of Race Development*, 477).

⁴ In recent years, West Virginia has called itself the “The Mountain State” or used the song lyric “Almost Heaven, West Virginia”.

⁵ “The pan handle of Vermillion [sic] [C]ounty has been erected into a new county called Ford [. . .] Heretofore Vermillion [sic] has been the worst-shaped county in the United States [. . .] Vermillion [sic]

hereafter will be a square shaped county; and Ford will take possession of the 'horn' and angles belonging to the old county" (see Chicago *Tribune* 1859). Illinois spells the parent county's name *Vermilion*.

⁶ In most cases, a geographical panhandle has inspired the name. An acceptable exception might be a municipality, federal post office, or rural school, named *Panhandle*, of which there are several examples in the corpus. The naming inspiration for such exceptions to the rule might or might not have been an actual panhandle.

⁷ To obtain a copy of the corpus, contact the author.

⁸ For discussions of branded product names, see Danesi 2006 and 2011.

⁹ "Pan Handle" already had been the nickname of the Pittsburgh & Steubenville and became the nickname of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis.

¹⁰ The school district takes its name from the northern panhandle of Montgomery County, while the drafting company's founder was once a student in the district and wanted to honor his family's home area and the district in naming his *Panhandle Drafting* firm. Aaron Hopper, Correspondent, email message to author, January 26, 2023; Zac Brown, Correspondent, email message to author, September 7, 2023.

¹¹ As the first or later word, West Virginia namegivers employed "Eastern" in their panhandle enterprise names 234 times and "Northern" 54 times.

¹² These numbers do not include the rare cases where an enterprise name in one state contained the name of a different state.

¹³ Zamboanga is a peninsula, not a true panhandle.

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Notes on the Contributor

Professor Emeritus of Geography **Michael D. Sublett** served on the faculty at Illinois State University from 1970 to 2015 and chaired the Department of Geography-Geology from 1978 to 1988. His research in recent years has dealt with place names and the naming of place-based entities in the United States.

Correspondence to: Michael D. Sublett, Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment, Illinois State University, Campus Box 4400, Normal IL 61790-4400, USA. Email: mdsuble@ilstu.edu