



Approved, April 13, 2023

Pending Virginia Place Name Proposal before the Domestic Names Committee, USBGN

**Change Lake Pelham to Lake Culpeper**

**Proposal Information**

Proposed name	<b>Lake Culpeper</b>
Proposal type	change name considered offensive
Current official name	Lake Pelham
GNIS ID	<a href="#">1472179</a>
Proponent	Town of Culpeper
Date proposed	12/2/22
Submitter	same
Date submitted	same
BGN case number	5926

**Feature Details**

Primary coordinates	38.4639972, -78.0393667
Feature class	reservoir
Feature size	approx. 250 acres
Feature description	SW of the Town of Culpeper, N of U.S. Hwy 29
Name history	Named for the nearby community of Culpeper
USGS primary topo map	Culpeper West 1:24,000
State(s)	Virginia
County(s)	Culpeper County
Land ownership	Town of Culpeper

**BGN decisions**

- None

**Other Names**

- Unpublished names: None found
- Published names:
  - Lake Pelham: USGS 1979, 1986, 1997
  - Pelham Lake: USGS National Water Information System, 2022
  - Pelham Reservoir: Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, 2022

**Case Summary**

This proposal is to change the name of Lake Pelham, an approximately 250-acre reservoir in Culpeper County and just outside the corporate boundary of the Town of Culpeper, to Lake Culpeper. The reservoir was constructed in 1972 and is owned by the Town of Culpeper and used as its water source.

The proposal was submitted by the Town of Culpeper Department of Community Development. The change was approved by the Town Council on October 11, 2022 by a vote of 5-4. The proposal states that “The existing name of Lake Pelham stems from an Alabama-native Confederate soldier, Major John Pelham. The Town would prefer that the name of the reservoir not stem from a divisive individual. The name ‘Lake Culpeper’ is felt to be more representative of the entire community.”

According to the October 11, 2022 Town Council minutes:

- on February 9, 2021, the Council approved a motion to rename the reservoir and referred the item to the Light & Power and Environmental Services Committee to initiate the process for a name change.
- on May 11, 2021, the Council did not approve a motion to change the name to Lake Culpeper, a name recommended by the Light & Power and Environmental Services Committee
- on September 27, 2022, the Public Safety, Public Works, Planning & Community Development Committee passed a motion to recommend the name change to the Town Council

Many local news articles cited comments from council members and the public, both for and against the change. They also referenced a 1975 *Culpeper Star-Exponent* article which stated that the name Lake Pelham had been selected through a contest sponsored by the Town and the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation Service.

John Pelham (1838-1863) was an artillery officer under J.E.B. Stuart who was mortally injured in the 1863 Battle of Kelly’s Ford and died from his injuries at the Culpeper courthouse. Culpeper and the surrounding area have several historic markers noting Pelham’s life and participation in nearby battles.

Culpeper County was chartered in 1749 and was named for Lord Thomas Colepeper (often spelled as Culpeper) (1635-1689), the Colonial Governor of Virginia from 1677 to 1683. The Town of Culpeper was originally chartered as the Town of Fairfax in 1759 and renamed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1869.

The USACE National Inventory of Dams lists the reservoir’s dam name as “Mountain Run Dam #50” with an alternate name of Lake Pelham.

The Town of Culpeper owns and operates a boat rental business near the dam, which will have new signs in the 2023 season showing the name “Lake Culpeper Adventures” in place of the existing “Lake Pelham Adventures.” The Town plans to spend \$9,000 to change reservoir signs. The Town has no plans to rename or remove any other reference to Major Pelham.

A neighborhood north of Culpeper is named Pelham Manor and is recorded in GNIS as a populated place. The streets of the neighborhood are named after Confederate generals.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources uses the name Pelham Reservoir. The USGS National Water Information System refers to a water monitoring station at the reservoir as Pelham Lake.

**Stakeholder Input**

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Local government	Town of Culpeper [proponent] Culpeper County	Support
State Names Authority Federal Agency	Virginia Board on Geographic Names n/a	
Federally Recognized Tribes	All federally recognized Tribes contacted under Policy X	
Other	Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources	No opinion

Source: Quarterly Review List 450, Released February 6, 2023 (<https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/dnc-review-lists>)

