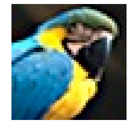
From: Fran Bagenal <bagenal@lasp.colorado.edu>
Subject: **OPAG Update Dec 24, 2007**
Date: December 24, 2007 11:04:41 AM MST
To: Curt Niebur <cniebur@hq.nasa.gov>
Cc: Fran Bagenal <bagenal@lasp.colorado.edu>



OPAG Update - December 24, 2007

My apologies for the long delay between OPAG updates - I have been waiting for news from NASA HQ on the Outer Planet Flagships. Now the news is out (item 1 below) we can consider the next phase. Here are some things I have heard and some of my thoughts - they are mine, obviously, and not official.

- Study reports - these are posted on the OPAG website (http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/announcements.html) except for the Titan study which has been promised by APL for some weeks. Please let me know if you have problems downloading these reports. Each team also gave presentations at the May OPAG meeting which are posted under OPAG Reports.

- Curt Niebur (NASA HQ) is preparing a public report on the "selection rationale" for the 3 studies in Phase 2 (see below). The study teams will also be debriefed.

- The taxpayers paid for the 4 mission concept studies as well as for the 2 teams who reviewed the science and the technical/management/cost issues of the studies. It seems reasonable, therefore, that the reviews of the 4 mission concepts be made public (within the limits of ITAR). I urge NASA HQ to release the reviews (Forms A, B and C) from the Science and TMCO panels for all 4 mission concept studies.

- The reviews of the 4 mission concepts had not been completed by the time of the November OPAG meeting but we discussed various issues related to studying and selecting the next outer planets flagship mission. In particular we noted the difficulty of (a) fitting within a tight budget, and (b) coordinating with international partners (e.g. ESA and JAXA). Regarding budget, it was not until about 2/3 through the study period that the teams learned that the NASA contribution is likely limited to ~$2B. It would not be surprising, therefore, for the concept studies to comprise more ambitious missions with radical descope options to meet a $2B cap. While I have not yet seen the official rationale for selection of 3 missions for further study, it seems to me that evaluation of cheaper options is a likely major goal. Obviously, one way to enhance a mission is to collaborate with international partners. Jim Green has been discussing with ESA and JAXA ways to collaborate on the next phase of the mission studies. But, as we discussed at OPAG, the different timetables, processes and regulations (such as ITAR on the US side) complicates such collaborations. Nevertheless, I believe the will to collaborate is strong on all sides. My understanding is that concrete plans will be developed between NASA, ESA and JAXA early in the new year.

- My understanding on the 3 Phase-2 studies is that they will be completed about September-ish 2008 and that the teams will be appointed by NASA HQ. I suspect that the ground-rules will be rather different for the next 3 studies. Lower costs, less complexity and combining international collaborations all seem likely to me. I would also expect the Titan study to consider maximizing opportunities for science at Enceladus.

- Part of me is disappointed that after nearly a year of studies we do not have a couple of missions that are closer to selection to fly. A more rational part of me says "Hey, NASA is seriously talking about an outer planets flagship. Keep working at it". After all, I have been preaching to OPAG that outer planet missions take a long time and lots of persistence. Yes, the NASA landscape keeps shifting - what's new?! I keep reminding myself that the most important thing is to get a flagship mission started that is likely to actually fly successfully - and this means defining the mission with sufficient fidelity so that when a mission is actually started the cost and duration do not grow out of control, prohibiting any further mission within the lifetime of even junior OPAGers.

So, on behalf of the OPAG community I thank the many scientists and engineers who worked very hard throughout 2007 on the 4 SDTs and I encourage us all to support the NASA/ESA/JAXA teams that will spend much of 2008 continuing the good work.

Wishing you all Jolly Holidays & Best Wishes for 2008!

Fran Bagenal
OPAG Chair
Professor of Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences
Laboratory of Atmospheric and Space Physics
UCB 392 University of Colorado
Boulder CO 80309-0392
bagenal at colorado.edu

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1 - Phase-2 of the Outer Planets Studies - from James Green, Director, Planetary Sciences Division, NASA HQ

NASA Planetary Science Division is announcing that the Phase-2 studies
for this next Outer Planets Flagship (OPF) will be Europa Explorer,
Jupiter System Orbiter, and Titan Explorer. These studies will be
carried out in cooperation with our ESA and JAXA partners over this
next fiscal year. The new studies will concentrate on the findings from
the technical reviews just completed in November. We are in the process
of developing new ground rules plus the necessary programmatic changes
that will be needed to include our international collaborators and are
working to starting them as soon as possible in the New Year. Finally
I want to again recognize all the members of the four original Phase-1
study teams and the evaluation panels. Their diligent hard work is
greatly appreciated. Without their tremendous support and unique
scientific and technical skills we would not be at the threshold of
defining the next OPF in step with our international partners.
Congratulations to all!

This announcement was made in the Planetary Exploration Newsletter - PEN which seems to be the current communication organ of the Planetary Science Division at NASA HQ. See
PEN Website: http://planetarynews.org

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2 - Report & presentations from OPAG November meeting

For a report on the OPAG meeting held on November 8-9, 2007 in Greenbelt, MD go to:
http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/reports.html
You will also find the agenda and links to the presentations.

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3 - Scientific Investigations from Planetary Probes and Aerial Platforms

COSPAR 13-20 July 2008, Montreal
(http://www.cospar-assembly.org/)

Scientific Investigations from Planetary Probes and Aerial Platforms
Symposium B06 (Co-Sponsors: EGU, AOGS, IAMAS/ICPAE)

Scientific Organizing Committee
Sushil Atreya (University of Michigan, USA), Main Scientific Organizer
Jean-Pierre Lebreton (ESTEC, Netherlands), Deputy Scientific Organizer
Anil Bhardwaj (VSSC, India), AOGS representative
Athena Coustenis (Obs. Paris-Meudon), IAMAS/ICPAE representative
James Cutts (JPL, USA)
Torrence Johnson (JPL, USA)
Ralph Lorenz (JHU-APL, USA)

Symposium Description
Planetary exploration has evolved to a point where in situ measurements are not only
possible but are recognized to be essential for answering the major questions of the
formation of the solar system and the origin and evolution of planetary atmospheres. The
Galileo probe at Jupiter, Huygens probe at Titan and the VEGA balloons at Venus are
just some examples of past in situ missions. New concepts are being developed for
exploring Titan with balloons, Saturn and the other giant planets with entry probes, and
Mars with advanced rovers. This symposium will focus on key scientific results from past
in situ explorations, lessons learned, and science and technology concepts and challenges
for future exploration of the planets and satellites with entry probes and aerial platforms.
Presentations will comprise a mix of invited, contributed and poster contributions.
Publication of papers in the Advances in Space Research is anticipated.
Message to authors: Bring your manuscript to the meeting to expedite reviewing.
Formatting instructions will be made available on the COSPAR meeting website.

Contact information
Sushil K. Atreya
Professor of Atmospheric and Space Science
University of Michigan

Space Research Building
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2143 USA
email: atreya at umich.edu
Tel: 734-936-0489 (work); 734-764-7221 (secretary)
Fax: 734-936-0503
Webpage: http://www.umich.edu/~atreya

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4 - BROADENED JUPITER DATA ANALYSIS PROGRAM

To aid your proposal planning for 2008 - a repeat of message from last OPAG update:

At the recent DPS meeting it was announced that the New Horizons Jupiter Data Analysis Program (NHJDAP) would be broadened to include the analysis of older data in the Jupiter system, not just from the New Horizons mission. This is appropriate in that the Galileo mission data returned after calendar year 2000 was never open to a Data Analysis Program. Furthermore the planetary community has been greatly stimulated by the new Flagship studies in the Jupiter system and this provides a perfect opportunity to support further mission studies in this area.

In order to have the Planetary Data System nodes prepare for analysis of the older data and complete the ingesting of all the recent New Horizons Jupiter system encounter data our plan is to release both the Cassini DAP and the revised JDAP calls in ROSES 2008 as early in the year as possible (February 2008). The due dates will be separated by 2-4 weeks to facilitate PIs proposing to both. The due dates will be in the May timeframe with a review panel meeting in the summer. Please carefully check the upcoming NSPIRES announcements and program calls for additional details or contact James Green (james.green@nasa.gov) or Denis Bogan (dbogan@nasa.gov).

For future information on this announcement, check http://nspires.nasaprs.com/

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5 - Next OPAG Meeting

At the November meeting we discussed having the next OPAG meeting in Boulder in March/April. Obviously, we want to avoid LPSC (March 10-14th, 2008). Please let me know any other dates we should avoid. Or any specific items for the agenda.