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Outer Planets Assessment Group - Update - August 25, 2006

<http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/>
Next OPAG meeting - Tucson, AZ - November 7-8th.
Information about the meeting logistics will be posted on the OPAG website by early September.

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Planetary Science Subcommittee and the NASA Advisory Committee

The PSS met on July 6-7, 2006. The primary charge of the committee was to plan for the conference on lunar science that Jack Schmitt (NAC Chair) has planned for Feb/Mar 2007. PSS also considered various issues related to budget and strategic planning for planetary science at NASA. The meeting report is posted at the OPAG website http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/7_06_report.pdf. This report has been given to NASA administrators but it is not official advice (to which NASA is obliged to respond). It is passed to the NAC's Science Committee (along with the other 3 committee's reports) who passed their recommendations to NASA.

The next meeting of PSS is September 25-26th in Boulder Colorado at Southwest Research Institute. All PSS meetings are open to the public. There will be a 1-hour period on the agenda for public comments. The PSS website (including committee names, presentations and reports) is http://science.hq.nasa.gov/strategy/NAC_sci_subcom/planetary.html

The NAC report from the May meeting is now available at http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/oer/nac/recommendations/Feb-06_Rec-Backgnd.pdf
This is the official NAC advice to NASA. The NAC met on July 20th but has not yet delivered their report from this meeting.

Following this July meeting of NAC Charles Kennel, Wes Huntress and Gene Levy resigned from the NAC. There has been much press on this issue, such as the following report in Science magazine <http://sciencenow.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/2006/822/3>

Remarks by Administrator Mike Griffin about the environment in which the NASA Advisory Council, its Committees and its Subcommittees function.

"I am sorry that the community is "concerned", whether about the resignations of several NAC members, or the effectiveness of the NAC structure.

"My observation is that by "effectiveness", what the scientific community really means is, "the extent to which we are able to get NASA to do what we want them to do". It is further my opinion that the scientific community, whose work in these areas is largely funded by NASA, expects to have

far too large a role in prescribing what work NASA should do, and accordingly what work NASA should fund. The inherent and long-standing conflict-of-interest is obvious.

"The new NAC structure exists to collect and channel the advice of the scientific community to NASA, within the bounds and constraints of NASA's presidentially and congressionally approved program. To this point, NAC members serve an Agency which is constrained by the dictates of Presidential policy, the most recent NASA Authorization Act (in this case, in 2005), and current Congressional appropriations legislation.

The program that I "administer" is bounded by those constraints. Consequently, NAC advice must respect those boundaries. The NAC advises NASA on the makeup and conduct of Agency programs subject to those boundary conditions.

"Therefore, it is neither germane nor useful for NAC members to offer advice (for example) on whether Science ought to have greater priority within NASA as compared to manned spaceflight, or whether the SMD portfolio should be rebalanced to emphasize Earth science over planetary science, or whether the Moon is an appropriate focus (in comparison to Mars) for the next phase of the manned spaceflight program, or other similar issues. As I am sure you know, there are other venues (such as your own NAS/Space Studies Board) for such questions, but the NASA Advisory Council is not one of them.

"The most appropriate recourse for NAC members who believe the NASA program should be something other than what it is, is to resign. This is not a pejorative statement; some of those who have resigned are friends, and have assured me that they remain so. The NAC members who have resigned will be replaced by other members of the scientific community, fully as competent and credentialed as those who have left the Council.

"More broadly, there has been a view, which in my opinion has been both too widely and too long held, that NASA is somehow responsible to a variety of external constituencies, a list of which is far too long to reproduce here, even if I could remember them all! In fact, the Agency is responsible to the President and to the Congress, in practice through our Congressional oversight committees. It operates within and subject to the dictates of Presidential policy and, most importantly, the appropriations and authorization legislation voted by Congress. We strive very, very hard to meet all of these requirements; this is not an easy task.

"There are many, many other groups who enjoy giving, or who believe themselves to be empowered to give, advice to NASA. These various advisors often provide deeply conflicting, or even irreconcilable, input to the Agency. We do listen to such advice, and we try not to miss any good ideas, but it must be recognized that in the end, advice is just that -- advice. NASA managers must take, and accept, all of the actual responsibility for planning and executing NASA's program, subject only the constraints I have noted above."

OPAG members will have an opportunity to discuss this matter with NAC Chair, Harrison Schmitt at NASA night at the DPS meeting in October.

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AGU Sessions on Outer Solar System

11 out of the 20 Planetary sessions at the Fall 2006 AGU meeting relate to the outer solar system. The meeting will be in San Francisco 11-15, December 2006 and abstracts are due by September 7th.

- P02: Studies of the Interiors of Giant Planets
- P03: Earth to Titan: Terrestrial Morphology and Modeling Analogues in Support of Cassini-Huygens Data Interpretation
- P04: Enceladus: Water, Warmth, Organics. . .and Life?
- P06: Multi-Instrument Studies of Objects in the Saturn System
- P09: Interactions of Icy Moons and Rings with Outer Planet Magnetospheres
- P10: Planetary Rings: Observation and Theory
- P11: Once in a Blue Moon: The Surprising Diversity of Outer Planet Satellites
- P12: Titan
- P13: Saturn
- P16: Trans-Neptunian Objects: Observations, Models, and Laboratory Studies
- P17: Laboratory Measurements of Ice Properties Relevant to the Geophysics and Geology of Ice-Rock Bodies

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Enceladus Workshop October 8th

From Carolyn Porco and Chris McKay:

We are very much looking forward to the first meeting of the Enceladus Focus Group, to be held at Caltech in Pasadena, CA on October 8, 2006, and are busy now making arrangements and determining the schedule of presentations.

However, it seems that we may have a lot more people in attendance than our original estimate of 50. Because it is important for determining our precise meeting location at Caltech that we know just how many individuals are intending to turn up, we are asking *everyone who is planning to attend any part of the meeting* to register at the following website.

https://encfg.ciclops.org/meeting_registration.php

It will take 5 seconds to do, and there is no registration fee. We just need you to sign up. And please help spread the word by sending this email to anyone you know who might not have signed up yet for the Enceladus Focus Group mailing list, but who is interested in attending this meeting. (This email has gone out to the Cassini scientist list, as well.)

We have now posted the list of abstracts we have received for our meeting on October 8 at Caltech.
https://encfg.ciclops.org/meeting_registration.php

If I've counted correctly, we have 38 abstracts ... more than enough for a full day of 5 minute presentations, with 5 minutes of discussion immediately following, and then some time left for general discussion, depending on how late we are willing to go.
. 20 abstracts in Section I on ENCELADUS SCIENCE
. 7 abstracts in Section II on EARTH ANALOGS, EXTREMOPHILES, AND LIFE SEARCH
. 11 abstracts in Section III on FUTURE MISSION DESIGNS

The meeting will start at 8:30 am. We will wait a bit longer before assigning precise times to the start of each session, break times, and lunch time.

For now, look over the entries to get a feel for the diversity of topics to be covered. It should be quite a day.

enceladusfocus mailing list enceladusfocus@ciclops.org

Subscription: Send email to majordomo@ciclops.org
In the body of the email: subscribe enceladusfocus -or- unsubscribe enceladusfocus

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Cassini Huygens Data Sets on PDS

The official release of five Huygens data sets: DWE, ACP, GCMS, HASI and HK.

The data sets are ready, and will be available from the PDS atmospheres node. <http://atmos.nmsu.edu/>

The direct link is http://atmos.nmsu.edu/data_and_services/atmospheres_data/Huygens/Huygens.html
The data are also available from the ESA PSA: www.rssd.esa.int/psa

The main page gives the main announcements. You can access the database

on the left navigation vertical bar ("Access the Archive")
You need to have JAVA on your machine, otherwise it will not work.
The PSA browser will start in a few seconds.

You have a panel "Huygens" that you have to open. An then you can navigate. At the first glance it can look a bit complicated, but after a few 'clicks' I have found it useful. You will have two ways for downloading: directly or through a shopping basket.

Note that to be able to retrieve the data you have to register (email, address ...). This step will not take very long.

Any feedback, problems, etc : psahelp@rssd.esa.int
In case of problems, there is a FAQ link: http://www.rssd.esa.int/index.php?project=PSA&page=PSA_FAQ
PSa quick guide: <http://www.rssd.esa.int/index.php?project=PSA&page=qguide>

And we look forward to releasing the three remaining data sets after the summer.
Kind Regards,

Olivier, Lyle, Reta, Jean-Pierre and Joe
Any feedback, problems, etc : lhuber@nmsu.edu

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Probe Workshop Report

The Fourth International Planetary Probe Workshop was held in Pasadena, California on 19-23 June 2006. The Workshop was preceded by a two day short course on "In Situ Instruments for Planetary Probes and Aerial Platforms". The short course attracted 60 registrations of which 21 were students (6 from Europe), and the workshop was attended by 188 participants, including 42 students (10 from Europe) and 146 regular registrants (30 from Europe). Further details on the workshop objectives and agenda can be viewed at <http://ippw.jpl.nasa.gov>.
See 3-page report at OPAG website <http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/announcements.html>

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OPAG Scientific Goals and Pathways document
<http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/>

The OPAG Steering Group has written a document (July 2006) that sets out the scientific goals for exploration of the outer solar system and pathways for achieving these goals. It is 35 pages (i.e. much shorter than the Survey and Roadmap - each over 140 pages) and we have included lots of color graphics which we hope convey the excitement and value of exploring the outer solar system. But basically it is a policy document and we present findings aimed at NASA's Solar System Exploration Division and the Planetary Science Subcommittee of the NAC, the official advisory body to NASA.

50 copies of this document were distributed at the July PSS meeting. We aim to have copies to hand out at DPS and AGU. Please pass the document on to people you think should see it at your institution and elsewhere.

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Triton for Fun

There are a lot of fans of the outer solar system out there. I pass on this website that I bumped into. The May newsletter featured Enceladus. I fancy a magnetosphere hat.... <http://www.tritonfun.com>

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