

NASA Advisory Council Subcommittee Recommendation

Subcommittee Name: Planetary Science

Chair: Sean Solomon

Date of Public Deliberation: 7 October 2007

Date of Transmission to Science Committee: 15 October 2007

Short title of the proposed Recommendation

Creation of a Small Bodies Assessment Group

Short description of the proposed Recommendation

The PSS recommends that NASA and NAC approve the formation of a Small Bodies Assessment Group before the end of this calendar year.

Major reasons for proposing the Recommendation

There is a large community of solar system scientists who focus their research on the smaller bodies of the solar system, including asteroids, comets, meteorites and their parent bodies, dust particles, irregular satellites, Trojans, Centaurs, and Trans-Neptunian Objects (TNOs). The interests of this community have been represented, to date, by OPAG, but the interests of OPAG focus on the giant planets and their major satellites, and comparatively few representatives of the small bodies community have participated in OPAG deliberations.

Representing a self-organized steering committee, PSS member Hal Weaver presented a proposal for adding a Small Bodies Assessment Group (SBAG) to the mix of analysis and assessment groups providing input to PSS and, through PSS, to the NAC. The scope of SBAG would encompass all small bodies that orbit the Sun, as well as meteorites, dust, and the irregular satellites (including Phobos and Deimos). Following NAC and NASA approval of an SBAG, a Small Bodies Workshop will be planned to develop an organizational structure, to draft an outline for a white paper laying out a strategy for the exploration of small solar system bodies, and developing a community web site. The PSS regards the proposal for an SBAG as a compelling means to ensure the full participation in NASA planning of the solar system small bodies community.

Consequences of no action on the proposed Recommendation

In the absence of an assessment group focused on the Solar System's small bodies, the full participation of the small bodies science community in NASA planning processes would be unlikely.