

PSS telecon 10/27/11

Committee Members Present: Jim Green (HQ), Jonathan Rall (HQ), Sarah Noble (HQ), Jim Bell, Julie Castillo, Tom Cravens, Dave Des Marais, John Grant, Sanjay Limaye, Bill McKinnon, Louise Prockter, Chip Shearer, Paul Steffes, Dawn Sumner, Jessica Sunshine, Mark Sykes and Mini Wahdwa

The committee chair, Ron Greeley, did not join the telecon, we found out shortly after it ended that he had passed away earlier in the day. Ron was a pillar of our community and this is a big loss. We are grateful to him for his leadership, dedication, and service to this committee and the entire planetary community. He will be greatly missed.

Goal of the meeting:

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss pertinent issues prior to the NAC Science Committee meeting next week, including progress with the NASA/ESA Mars program, the upcoming Senior Review, and the R&A budget.

The next PSS meeting, planned for November 2nd and 3rd in Washington, DC has been canceled in light of Ron's passing. It will be rescheduled at a later date.

Jim Green noted that the NASA/ESA bi-lat had been delayed so there is not much to report on that front. A new date has not been scheduled, but it should be soon.

Jim talked about the upcoming Senior Review process. The plan is for a single review to be held biannually (every 2 years) to evaluate all missions in extension. Jim made clear that everyone is vying for the same budget, no mission will have a "fenced-off" budget. Draft guidelines for the review were distributed on Sept 30th, comments have been received and are being incorporated. The final guidelines will be sent to missions on or about Oct 31st with proposals due 90 days later (~Jan 31st). The review will be held in March with the decisions executed beginning in FY13. The missions to be included in this review include: Cassini, Deep Impact, GRAIL, LRO, Mars Odyssey, Mars Opportunity, Mars Express, MRO, and Venus Express.

Mini Wahdwa asked if Jim had an estimate for the \$s available. Jim said that there would be guidelines in the document we are about to release. John Grant asked if we can assume that the sum will be substantially less than the current sum. Jim noted that the planetary budget is on a negative trend for the next few years, back at the April PSS meeting he had shown a canonical program to fit that trend, and some areas, particularly R&A can't handle substantial cuts, so to preserve those lines, other things will have to be cut more.

Jonathan showed a few slides on the R&A budget, there will be more discussion on this at the next F2F.

Julie Castillo asked if there was any follow up on the PSS assessment. Jim noted that we are in fact in the process of reviewing our R&A budgets right now and we do owe PSS a response to that.

Jim talked about what he will present to the NAC Science Committee next week. He noted that the negotiations with ESA have been discussed extensively in the press and he would like to provide some context for that discussion. This will also be the first opportunity to share the New Frontiers selection and the Discovery downselects with the Committee. He is also looking for science nuggets he can share, if

you have any, please send them to Jim asap. Bill McKinnon has graciously agreed to stand in for Ron (via telecon). The planetary presentation will be Monday (Nov 1st) from 10:30-12. NAC meetings are open to the public and Jim encourages everyone to listen in.

Before ending the telecon, Jim mentioned the Bob Zubrin article that appeared in the Washington Times earlier that day, which claimed that “the Obama administration intends to terminate NASA’s planetary exploration program.” Jim pointed out that Zubrin's view of planetary science is Mars-centric, and we are facing challenges on that front. We are still working with ESA to move forward there, but we are in an austere budget climate and the political process is moving slowly. To the idea that there has been any move to “terminate” planetary science, he responded "I'm here to say the future maybe doesn't look as healthy as it has been, but it is still the best [planetary science] program in the world."