

OPAG Update - April 17, 2008

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1. Report on OPAG spring 08 meeting
We had a productive meeting in Boulder, Colorado on Monday
March 31st and April 1st. The meeting report is posted on the
OPAG website
<http://www.lpi.usra.edu/opag/reports.html>

The presentations from the meeting are also posted.

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2. Comment from the Chair - since many OPAGers were too busy
on OPF SDTs to attend the OPAG meeting, here is the Chair's introduction.
As OPAG enters its fourth year, we can look back and see some major progress:
- An Outer Planet Flagship mission is in the budget.
- there WILL be a mission to an outer icy satellite (whether Europa or Titan
is not clear). We have two large Science Definitions Teams, joint with ESA and
JAXA,
that involve about 80 people who are working hard to develop such missions.
The NASA budget remains an issue. Will there be enough funds for a mission
that addresses the primary science goals at either of these targets?
The good news is that by studying these missions and making good
decisions, we can hopefully avoid some of the cost overruns that have
plagued missions such as MSL and JWST.
I will repeat what I have said at every OPAG meeting for the past four years:

There is no point having an Outer Planet Flagship mission that ends up costing so much that we cannot afford to send a second for 15-20 years.

The bad news is that (a) the outer solar system is a tough place to get to, incurring long times and high costs; and (b) MSL has yet to be completed and launched, and JWST is only just starting to cut metal.

And then there is the bad news that one of the strongest advocates of OPF, Alan Stern, has left the NASA AA position. BUT, we have the strongest support with Jim Green, Director of the Planetary Science Division. He started last year's OPF studies (before Alan arrived at HQ) and he is sticking to OPF like a limpet!

For OPAG, our job is to make the strongest case for the exploration of the Outer Solar System - and to find the best way to make it happen within technical and fiscal feasibility. It's not OPAG's job to weigh in on priorities between outer planets vs. inner planets. That's for PSS, for COMPLEX and for the next Decadal Survey.

It is our job to help the SDTs for OPF to do their job and to stand by whatever mission is selected. It is crucial that the OPAG community stand by whatever mission is selected - and to stick with it through completion.

Finally, some thoughts on the word "flagship". Cassini-Huygens is the archetype - the Battleship Galactica - of solar system flagships. It has 12 science instruments in the orbiter's payload, plus another six were in the probe. These are some of the most sophisticated scientific instruments flown in space. The payload was designed to explore the whole Saturn system - from deep inside Saturn to the moons and magnetosphere. The payload was larger than strictly necessary in anticipation of serendipitous discoveries - and Enceladous, for one, delivered plenty.

The next mission to either the Saturn or Jupiter system will be very different. Seven spacecraft have visited the jovian system and Juno will soon be on its way there too. Two flybys and Cassini-Huygens have completed our reconnaissance of the saturnian system.

The scientific objectives of OPF will be far more focussed.

We will be going to tough places. Europa is both deep in Jupiter's gravitational well AND buried in fearsome radiation belts. Titan may be an easier target to orbit than Europa but it is farther, colder and just as tough to explore. So, each of us in the OPAG community must realize that the OPF mission that is selected may not carry their favorite super-duper, fancy-dancy widget to measure their favorite piece of science.

At the same time, the OPF study teams are charged to find the payload

