National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001

November 5, 2012

Dr. Steven W. Squyres
Chairman
NASA Advisory Council
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Dr. Squyres:

Enclosed is NASA's response to a recommendation from the NASA Advisory Council meeting held July 25-27, 2012, at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Council would like further background on the response. I appreciate the Council's thoughtful consideration leading to the recommendations and welcome its continued findings, recommendations, and advice concerning the U.S. civil space program.

I look forward to working closely with you and members of the Council in the future.

Sincerely,

Charles F. Bolden, Jr.
Administrator

Enclosure:
2012-02-07 (SC-01) New Telescope Assets

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation
New Telescope Assets
2012-02-07 (SC-01)

Recommendation:
The Council recommends that NASA should study possible scientific uses of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO)–donated telescope assets, to see whether it can capitalize on this opportunity or not, exploring possible applications to high priority science identified in the various Decadal surveys in consultation with the broad scientific community.

Major Reasons for the Recommendation:
The donation appears to involve very high quality telescope assets with excellent capabilities, better than the best NASA ultraviolet/near-infrared telescopes operating in space today (e.g., the Hubble Space Telescope). The telescope assets could leverage the limited budget available for NASA science in the coming decade, for a much greater scientific reach than would otherwise be possible.

Consequences of No Action on the Recommendation:
In order to decide how best to respond to the transfer of telescope assets, NASA needs to understand – much better than it currently does – the possible scientific uses of these assets, considering possibilities across the Science Mission Directorate disciplines. Without more study, NASA's decision will be made in the absence of this crucial information.

NASA Response:
NASA concurs with the recommendation on assessing the potential scientific uses of the telescope assets. Plans for two Science Mission Directorate (SMD)-led studies related to these assets were discussed at a NASA Strategy Implementation Planning (SIP) meeting and those plans were approved.

NASA will conduct a broad survey to assess potential uses of these assets across the science portfolio including Heliophysics, Planetary Science, and Astrophysics. Also included in the survey will be other NASA strategic priorities with Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate (HEOMD) and Space Technology as active partners, considering higher risk mission architectures and advanced technologies.

SMD is also conducting a focused mission concept study to identify potential uses of these assets to meet Astrophysics scientific priorities and assess financial requirements. SMD released a "Dear Colleague" letter soliciting applications from interested individuals in the astrophysical community for the formation of a Science Definition Team (SDT) that will assess the possible scientific use of one set of the telescope assets for advancing the science priorities of the 2010 Astrophysics Decadal

Enclosure

Survey. Applications from interested individuals were received by the September 19, 2012, deadline and are under review.

Both studies will be completed by approximately April 2013 and will employ reasonable budget assumptions coordinated with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). These studies will inform an eventual NASA decision on the future of the assets.