

Astronomy, Astrophysics, and Space Policy and Law

This white paper will be focused on astronomy, astrophysics, and space public policy and legal issues that should be considered as part of the Astro2020 Decadal Survey.

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An integral component of a robust Astro2020 Decadal Survey involves the perspective of public policy and law affecting the broader astronomy, astrophysics, and space sector. The relationship between the sector, on the one hand, and applicable public policy, on the other hand, involves dynamic aspects which deserve focus.

Of course, the entire Astro2020 survey seeks to influence public policy by guiding budget allocations for discovery, research, and their projects over the next several years. As such, the proposed white paper would not duplicate what will be effectuated through scientific and other aspects of the process. Rather, the intended focus will be on (a) the existing state of laws that affect the sector and policy decisions; (b) proposals for substantive changes in existing domestic law that will improve and facilitate the goals identified through the Astro2020 process; and, (c) the state of related international policy and law.

In the context of the latter category, particular focus can be directed toward policy discussions taking place in the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (“UNOOSA”). Having concluded the First United Nations Conference on Space Law and Policy in September 2018, and with plans for the second conference to occur in 2019, there exists a real effort to develop an international direction toward policy and law affecting sovereign nations and their citizens – both natural persons and entities. Some of these topics include mitigation of space debris, ownership of space resources, and space traffic management. In particular, these policy areas affect and could directly impact the Astro2020 ambitions.

The domestic aspects of space policy and law should then be viewed in the context of the efforts to create a broader international consensus. In particular, focus would be made on concerns identified in the sector community including, but not limited to, the L2 Lagrangian point and its congestion potential. An effort could also be made to address the potential aspects of international and private partnerships. An effort could be made from the policy and legal perspective to address some of the impediments to international collaboration previously identified and determine whether policy directions might mitigate them to some degree.

In sum, the focus would be on guiding specific and broader policy directions that need to be addressed on a domestic and international scale to effectuate the longer term aspirations and objectives of the Astro2020 process. This perspective would be to help formulate broader, “long-term advice.” It would be hoped that a white paper from a specific policy and legal focus could compliment the substantial efforts from others in the forthcoming Decadal Survey and the key science priorities identified.

¹ This submission constitutes a placeholder for the full version of the White Paper that shall follow.