GEOGRAPHY AND THE INTERNATIONAL POLAR YEAR – 2007/2008

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Geography is as ancient as man. Exploration, satisfaction of biological needs, the necessity, 'science', to understand how to use environmental knowledge, and societal needs all led to integration of these interests. These interests are no different from those we face today.

I will provide you with the

RATIONAL
HISTORY
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

for the inclusion of geography in IPY 2007-2008. In doing so, I will explain

WHY?
WHAT?
HOW?

Geography addresses the five draft themes of IPY 2007-2008 as provided by the International Council for Science, and the proposed 6th theme on social sciences and the humanities.

RATIONAL: WHY? should we include geography?

The classical definition of geography describes it as the science of the earth. It is broadly divided into two segments. Physical geography deals with the composition of the earth's surface and the distribution of its features as well as the atmosphere that surrounds the earth and affects its climate. Cultural geography includes social, economic, and political aspects of human interactions; their affects on themselves and their habitat.

This definition provides the rational of why to include geography in IPY 2007-2008. Geography is less a body of knowledge than a technique for examining and relating phenomenon in terms of their varying distribution over the earth's surface. What better link to the concept of the early IPY creators than to increase knowledge in the polar sciences through international cooperation and connection to societal concerns than through geography?

HISTORY: WHAT? is the reason to include geography?

On three occasions, beginning in 1882-1883, scientists worked to expand knowledge about the circumpolar regions. The collective rationale for international cooperation was polar processes that extend beyond boundaries and exceed the abilities of any one nation.

The first IPY in 1882-1883 involved 11 countries and focused on aurora, geomagnetism, atmospheric electricity, and meteorology. Karl Weyprect, the originator of IPY I, mad no mention of the need for maps, understanding of the terrain or the cultures the international teams would encounter.

The second IPY, 1932-1933, expanded on the 'science' considered in IPY I. However, University of Saskatchewan archives and the World Data Centre for Terrestrial Physics archives note that environment, community, culture, as well as science were important and impacted those who participated in field science and data gathering. Further, this IPY connected the 'science' to human objectives of navigation, communication, weather and transportation.

The third IPY, 1957-1958, had its impetus in 'new' technologies and tools to expand 'science' and international collaboration. History does not record a specific reference to impacts other than new technologies that could be used for gathering scientific information. Yet, side references are made to weather, communication, military influence, and space applications.

The fourth IPY focuses on science; integrating and collecting data to improve predictions and investigate unknowns. Allow me to return to my original statement and suggest that we look toward the history of IPY II. Geography is as ancient as man. I suggest that this the the WHAT? What should we include in IPY IV – certainly geography.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: HOW? should we include geography?

Geography has been in the background of University of Alaska programs. It has not been a focus program in my memory that dates to 1973. It should be at the forefront of University of Alaska programs. The polar regions have sustained climatic change, have and continue to be, a melting pot for cultures, and continue to be at the cutting edge of scientific discoveries.

There is a proposal in front of the University of Alaska administration for a University of Alaska Integrated Geography Program (UAIGP). This program proposes to bring together resources within the University of Alaska system to deliver geography, 'the science of the earth', statewide. The core of the proposal is distance education and amalgamation of geography interests across the University of Alaska system.

We propose a Geography Summit. This would be a semester presentation delivered internationally through the Center for Distance Delivery. Topics presented would include those provided by the American Association of Geographers (AAG) list of experts , a 10-page list available on the AAG website, plus our own geographers within the University of Alaska system. Examples in our system might be:

Architectural Geography – Jack Hebert
Canadian Studies and Sense of Place – Cary De Wit
Military Geography – Mark Hamilton
Coastal and Marine Geography – Craig Dorman
Economic Geography – Tom Case

The summit would commence in 2005. It would be an enticement for international participation.

Our objective in presenting this opportunity to IPY IV is to again reiterate the importance of the integration of the cultural, modern social, economic, and military interests with the sciences. We are one world. Science, as the purists know it, is not the be-all-end all.