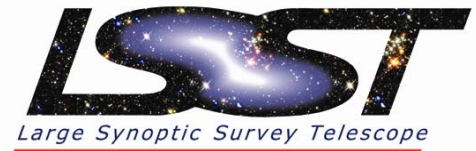


EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: May 17, 2006

RELEASE LSSTC-04



Site in Northern Chile Selected for Large Synoptic Survey Telescope

Cerro Pachón, an 8,800-foot (2,682-meter) mountain peak in northern Chile, has been selected as the site for the proposed Large Synoptic Survey Telescope (LSST).

Scheduled to see "first light" in 2012, the 8.4-meter LSST will be able to survey the entire visible sky every three nights with its three-billion pixel digital camera, probing the mysteries of Dark Matter and Dark Energy, and opening a movie-like window on objects that change or move on rapid timescales: exploding supernovae, potentially hazardous near-Earth asteroids as small as 100 meters, and distant Kuiper Belt Objects.

The decision to place the LSST on Cerro Pachón follows a two-year campaign of in-depth testing and analysis of the atmospheric conditions and quality of astronomical "seeing" at four sites in Chile, Mexico, and the Canary Islands. The eleven members of the Site Selection Committee, chaired by Marc Sarazin from the European Southern Observatory, reviewed detailed proposals from two final sites, San Pedro Mártir in Baja California, Mexico, and Cerro Pachón, regarding their suitability for the project. The final selection of Cerro Pachón was made by the LSST Corporation Board of Directors based on a recommendation from the Site Selection Committee.

Important factors when considering a site for the LSST include the number of clear nights per year, seasonal weather patterns, and the quality of images as seen through the local atmosphere. The chosen site also needed to have an existing observatory infrastructure and access to fiber optic links, to accommodate the anticipated 30 terabytes of data LSST will produce each night.

Science Contact Information:

J. Anthony Tyson, LSST Director; 530-752-3830, tyson@lsst.org

Donald Sweeney, LSST Project Manager; 520-661-9247; sweeney@lsst.org

Media Contact Information:

Suzanne Jacoby, LSST Corporation; 520-881-2626; sjacoby@lsst.org

Director of the Astronomy Department at Universidad de Chile Leonardo Bronfman said "Chilean astronomers are enthusiastic about having the LSST sited in Chile and participating in its development and operation. We have unparalleled access to a wide suite of facilities in Chile, and are eager to utilize these resources to complement the strengths of LSST."

"The LSST will be the World's most powerful survey telescope and demands a superb site. We finally had a difficult decision between two wonderful sites at Cerro Pachón in Chile and San Pedro Mártir in Mexico. It's too bad we can't build two telescopes - one in each hemisphere." said Donald Sweeney, LSST Project Manager. "The final decision was influenced by the existing infrastructure at Cerro Pachón and the array of synergistic facilities in the south." Cerro Pachón is already home to the Gemini South 8-meter telescope and the SOAR 4.1-meter telescope. LSST will be located on a peak on Cerro Pachón named El Peñón.

"Siting LSST in Chile leverages the significant multi-wavelength astronomy investments already there," said University of California, Davis, Professor and LSST Director J. Anthony Tyson. "LSST will change the way we observe the universe by mapping the visible sky deeply, rapidly, and continuously. LSST will open entirely new windows on our universe, yielding discoveries in a variety of areas of astronomy and fundamental physics."

More information about the LSST including current images, graphics, and animation can be found at <http://www.lsst.org>

In 2003, The University of Arizona, Research Corporation, the National Optical Astronomy Observatory, and the University of Washington formed the LSST Corporation, a non-profit 501(c)3 Arizona corporation, with headquarters in Tucson, AZ. Membership has expanded to include Brookhaven National Laboratory, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Johns Hopkins University, Kavli Institute for Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology - Stanford University, Las Cumbres Observatory Inc., Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, The Pennsylvania State University, University of California at Davis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and University of Pennsylvania.

The LSST research and development effort is funded in part by the National Science Foundation under Scientific Program Order No. 9 (AST-0551161) through Cooperative Agreement AST-0132798. Additional funding comes from private donations, in-kind support at Department of Energy laboratories and other LSSTC Institutional Members.

###