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NASA Announces Awards For Future Astrophysics Suborbital Flights

WASHINGTON -- NASA has selected nine scientific teams to work on future high-altitude balloon and sounding rocket payloads. The selected proposals address a wide range of astrophysical mysteries from dark matter and cosmic-ray antiprotons to studies of galaxy clusters and supernova remnants.

"The suborbital research program is a very important part of astrophysics," said Jon A. Morse, director of the Astrophysics Division of the Science Mission Directorate at NASA Headquarters in Washington. "We are very pleased to provide support for these selected projects, recommended through a highly competitive merit-based review process."

The projects also contribute to NASA's broader goals by providing hands-on training for early career scientists and engineers in space hardware and data analysis."

The recipients of the awards will develop payloads using detectors and instruments of their own design. Within several years, they will fly the payloads on sounding rockets or long-duration balloons. These suborbital investigations provide unique opportunities for executing science investigations and advancing the state-of-the-art in the areas of future spaceflight detectors and supporting technologies.

Early career researchers, especially graduate students, often play lead roles in developing suborbital payloads. Many past and present space astrophysics missions were led by former suborbital investigators and have used technologies originally developed for sounding rocket or balloon payloads.

"Everybody is looking forward to working with young researchers to conduct scientific observations and technology development from the vantage point of scientific balloons at the edge of space," said David Pierce, chief of the Balloon Program Office at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia. "We look forward to supporting these science missions, for the knowledge about our universe and the new technology they will produce."

The Sounding Rocket and Balloon Program offices at Wallops manage the sounding rocket and balloon flight operations, which are implemented via support contracts.

For a list of the selected scientists and the abstracts of their projects, visit:

<http://nasascience.nasa.gov/astrophysics/2009-suborbital-balloons-awards>

For more information about NASA's work with sounding rockets, visit:

<http://sites.wff.nasa.gov/code810>

For more information about NASA's work with scientific balloons, visit:

<http://sites.wff.nasa.gov/code820>

For more information about NASA's Astrophysics Division, visit

<http://nasascience.nasa.gov/astrophysics>

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