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Interactive Presentations - 33rd IAA SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE AND SOCIETY (IP)

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PRESERVING UNSPOILED SPACE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Abstract

Our actions in space have long lasting consequences that cannot be repaired or even, to some extent, foreseen. And yet there are many within the space community who do not see any value in preserving celestial bodies or other space features that have been untouched for millennia. But there is value to preserving unspoiled space for future generations.

First, there are the cultural reasons. Humankind has long looked into the night sky and used the constellations and planets for not only navigation but as the basis for numerous important societal traditions and beliefs. And to ignore the historical and cultural value of space is to ignore our own history and to prioritize Western culture over the rest of the planet. Second, there is the incredible intrinsic aesthetic, geohistorical, and scientific value of these "virgin" astrogeological formations. There is so much we can learn from the untouched surface of Venus and the undisturbed rings of Saturn, but once we move to exploit these potential environments, we will lose these opportunities forever. So, similar to the way we preserve various nature features on Earth, we should also ensure the protection of such sites in space. Lastly, as we have repeatedly seen, without guidelines and restrictions in place, commons, including those on Earth and in space, can be polluted and made nearly unusable for future generations. A prime example of this in the space context is the amount of debris and the crowded satellite constellations that now fill our Lower Earth Orbit. At some point we will make our LEO unusable for future generations and yet there are little to no incentives for anything but a race to see who can exploit this part of space faster for fear it will not be available for exploitation in the future. And there are similar problems with using primitive terraforming technology to drastically alter other celestial bodies.

This interactive presentation will focus on these three core reasons why we should protect space, or at least key parts of it, for future humanity and the legal bases that we can use to support the preservation of space as we currently know it. It will also engage Congress attendees to think of the space legacy we wish to leave behind and the ways in which we can explore and develop space without simply destroying it.