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May 6, 2008

Dr. Wendy L. Freedman  
Chair, GMT Board  
Crawford Greenewalt Director  
Observatories of the Carnegie Institution of Washington  
813 Santa Barbara Street  
Pasadena, California 91101-1232

Dear Wendy,

Thank you for your letter of March 31 on behalf of the Giant Magellan Telescope (GMT) Board. I have distributed the letter to the AURA Board, the Observatory Council, and posted it on the AURA web site. I referenced the letter at the outset of our recent Annual Meeting and provided hard copies to several Member Reps who were unable to access it on the website. A general discussion of the Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope (GSMT) prospects was also held with our Decadal Survey Steering Committee. Despite this, I am cognizant that much more engagement is needed. These are complex issues that require substantially more and broader interaction within AURA and within the community. To this end I very much welcome your invitation to increase the dialogue.

I and AURA are strongly committed to achieving the goals of the last Decadal Survey and providing community access to a Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope. It is significant that consortia like GMT, and Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), have exercised leadership and made such substantial progress. I and all the elements of AURA want these efforts to succeed and we will look for opportunities to contribute.

The joint statement by NSF, AURA, TMT and GMT issued in January, 2007 lays out a clear mandate for AURA as national Program Manager for GSMT. We take that as call to be proactive in developing the best possible case for GSMT for the upcoming Decadal Survey, and providing a clear set of criteria for decision making. Surely, this will entail a common and transparent understanding of costs during the full life cycle. I anticipate that we will need to work together to make sure that this can be accomplished.

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We also believe that the community support for GSMT must be coupled to a consensus that an ensemble of telescopes at all apertures are accessible both for sustaining the community and for developing observing programs for a GSMT. Finally, NOAO will need to have the resources to provide direct support for GSMT and to develop a community of public users.

Our goal is to advocate strong public participation in GSMT as we approach the next Decadal Survey, and to establish a clear basis for forming a direct partnership. There is no question that this partnership must be coupled to a Federal budgetary commitment and we are working with NSF to develop a common understanding of the timing, magnitude and form of this commitment.

I very much welcome your letter and the progress GSMT has made. I anticipate that we will need to increase our level of dialog over the next several years through the Decadal Survey process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill", written over the word "Sincerely,".

William S. Smith, Jr.  
President