

VERITAS Scrambles to Find New Site

The successful appeal against a permit to site VERITAS in the Coronado National Forest in Arizona has left the cosmic-ray detector homeless and possibly penniless.

"We're back to square one. Our funding agencies say they won't fund us unless we have a site decision by 1 July," says Trevor Weekes, spokesman for the Very Energetic Radiation Imaging Telescope Array System, a collaboration headed by the Smithsonian Institution. VERITAS, with its seven 10-meter telescopes, is one of several up-and-coming facilities worldwide designed to detect atmospheric Čerenkov showers triggered by high-energy gamma rays from gamma-ray bursts, active galactic nuclei, supernova remnants, pulsars, black holes, and other energetic astrophysical sources (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, June 2000, page 50).

VERITAS was granted a site permit in January. But that decision was reversed on 21 April, when the US Forest Service upheld an appeal by environmental and Native American groups that argued the telescope array would "not retain the visual quality" of the forest and that the Forest Service should amend its forest plan before granting the permit. The Coronado's Mt. Hopkins, Mt. Graham, Mt. Bigelow, and Mt. Lemmon already host astronomical facilities, says David Hodges, executive director of the Tucson-based Sky Island Alliance, one of the environmental groups that appealed. "We also had a lot of concern about the cumulative effect of astrophysical development," he adds.

Lucia Turner, the deputy regional forester for Arizona and New Mexico agrees: In upholding the appeal, she told the Coronado branch of the Forest Service to "complete a visual resource effects analysis including cumulative effects" and to prepare a forest plan amendment that incorporates VERITAS.

The overturning of the permit decision was a surprise, says Weekes. "It's been five years since we made the initial application, and there were no contacts with us by environmental groups until the appeal process." The VERITAS team had heard from a Native American group that opposed having VERITAS near its sweat lodge—but that's not why the permit was retracted.

Now, under the specter of losing Department of Energy and NSF funding for the \$22.5 million project, the



VERITAS team is scrambling to find a new site by the 1 July deadline. Although other sites in the national forest would be acceptable to both as-

tronomers and environmental groups, says Weekes, "it will take six months to a year for the Forest Service to process them." Project leaders are considering everything from leasing private land to moving to Mexico, he adds.

"The basic problem," says Weekes, "is that any fringe group, any small activist group, can object. It's a chilling message for new astronomical projects in the US. It makes siting telescopes overseas more attractive."

Toni Feder

Russian Prize Aims to Stimulate Energy Research

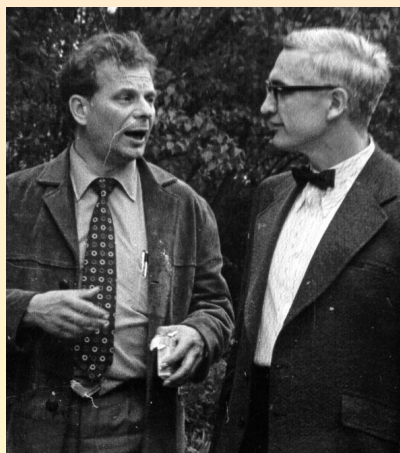
Three physicists will share the first annual Global Energy Prize, to be bestowed by President Vladimir Putin on 15 June in St. Petersburg, Russia. The \$900 000 purse will be split by Nick Holonyak of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Gennady Mesyats, a vice president of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and Ian Douglas Smith of Titan Corp in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The new prize was the brainchild of Zhores Alferov, a physics Nobel laureate and scientific leader of the Ioffe Physico-Technical Institute in St. Petersburg. "It had to be in a branch of science and technology not covered by the Nobel Prizes. I consider the energy problem to be the most important problem for human beings," says Alferov. The prize is intended to recognize and stimulate research and applications in all areas of energy and power generation.

His vision quickly won the blessing of President Putin, and then financial pledges from Russia's three largest energy companies, Alferov says. An administrative and oversight body, the Global Energy Foundation, was established in time for the first awards ceremony to take place this month during the city of St. Petersburg's 300th birthday celebration.

In the prize citation, Holonyak is recognized for his invention of "the first semiconducting light-emitting diodes in a visible part of the spectrum" and his "serious contribution to the development of energy-saving technologies" such as the thyristor, a switch for high currents and voltages. Mesyats and Smith, who have worked separately on the generation and use of powerful electrical pulses, are honored for "[giving] birth to a new direction in the field of energy—powerful pulse energy" and for research leading to the design of "unique pulse energy systems and equipment . . . now used successfully around the globe."

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RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The inaugural winners of the Global Energy Prize are Nick Holonyak (right in black-and-white photo, shown with prize instigator Zhores Alferov during a 1974 visit to Leningrad), Gennady Mesyats (right in color photo), and Ian Smith (left in color photo, which shows him receiving an honorary degree last year in Moscow).