

Abstract Submitted
for the APR07 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

An overview of the NASA Balloon Program in Support of Space and Earth Sciences Research DAVID PIERCE, NASA — For the past several decades, the NASA Balloon Program contributed significantly to space sciences. Scientific ballooning has been a key research tool and advances in the capability of ballooning can keep it at the forefront of research. Balloon payloads can incorporate cutting edge technologies that are not yet ready for a space mission. Balloon platforms provide a cost effective means to test and demonstrate these new technologies in a space environment. Ballooning has often been the pathfinder major space missions and made early results available years in advance. Balloon payloads have also been one of the most important training grounds for the next generation of instrumentalists. The purpose of this paper is to update the space and Earth science communities on new developments, current capabilities, recent accomplishments, record flights and future directions of the NASA balloon program.

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Date submitted: 15 Jan 2007

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