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Study of Aurora

Juan G. Roederer, interviewee

Steve Lay, host

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Steve Lay said northern scientists have recently taken a step to come together and share. Last month Dr. Juan G. Roederer, director of the University of Alaska Geophysical Institute, signed an agreement of cooperation with a counterpart from the Soviet Polar Geophysical Institute. Roederer said the study of the aurora is at very high latitudes. To maintain a dialog with the Soviets even at the scientific technical level is very difficult. The restrictions are even stronger than they have been in the past. The speed at which information can be exchanged has been hindered. He believes with the agreement they will be able to speed up their discussions and planning and maybe in the future be joined up in their experiments. Lay said the agreement provides a framework for working together and a promise for future expanded cooperation.

Roederer said at this stage it is an agreement of observing. They would be observing the same things at the same time. They would agree on a certain time when they would be making observations. The second stage of the agreement would be exchange of data. The third stage would be to get together and interpret the data hopefully with scientists from both institutes. Lay said the initial cooperative work would use certain observation points of each institute. From this beginning additional observatories will hopefully be included for future work. The observations will be made from the archipelago from Svalbard. This is Norwegian territory but it is under international treaty of the United States, the Soviet Union and many other countries. The Geophysical Institute has an aurora optical observatory in Svalbard which is operated in cooperation with the Norwegians. The Soviets also have an observatory. They also have another observatory on another island which is about 800-1000 kilometers from Svalbard at the same latitude towards the east. He said it would be extremely interesting to complement their observations of the aurora from Svalbard with the observations by the Soviets on Heiss Island. Lay said the Heiss Island observatory will complement the already ongoing work by the UAF Geophysical Institute. Their observations have always been done simultaneously with the observations in Alaska. Svalbard is located on the opposite side from Alaska in respect to the magnetic pole. They have obtained valuable information about the aurora from opposite sides of the magnetic pole. Roederer sees multiple benefits for the university, students and researchers from this agreement. He said there are several kinds of benefits. There is the pure scientific benefit. They will be able to make more detailed studies of the higher-latitude aurora. They also play a role in world affairs. Right now they have two students in

Svalbard. They are exposed to these international dealings between scientists through their work and involvement in this project. It is important to show students the other aspect of science – the political or policy aspect of science. It is a unique opportunity for students to see how international scientific politics is done. .