

FAST Tracks

December 2006

By Gary Hug

FAST members have contributed over 4,000 NEO observations from Farpoint. (and nearly another 1,000 from Sandlot.) The accomplishment NEKAAL has provided the scientific community is significant and I applaud all of you for your support and understanding while the FAST team dominated the telescope time and Farpoint's resources.

There is a series of events that are taking place over the next year nearly eliminating the need for our NEO follow-up efforts. (There are some new powerful surveys coming on line able to cover the sky many times a month to a magnitude depth beyond even the Tombaugh's capacity). Also, as of April 15th of 2007 our responsibility to NASA will have been completed. There were some NASA officials we worked with that have already relieved us of further obligation but just to make sure we fulfilled any obligation we decided to continue the FAST program until the April date. While we'll still do an occasional NEO run, the FAST program will cease.

Now it's your turn for telescope time.

In preparation for the use of the Tombaugh by other than NEO follow-up functions the NEKAAL Board has purchased a set of UBVRI filters for photometric analysis (which by the way also do a decent job of color imaging although you have to tweak the colors a bit). Also we have sold various pieces of equipment that were not being used and bought an adaptive optics unit for the Tombaugh to enable long integration times and improved sharpness of the resultant images.

The Board will be responsible for the usage of the Tombaugh and I suspect there will be a telescope coordinator appointed. I hope Dan Tibbets will be considered for that position. He probably knows more about the workings of the Tombaugh than anyone else in NEKAAL (myself included). He addressed the baffling issue with great success, invented something called the WDD (wind dampening device) that works quite well, and in general has the analytical skills to assess and apply solutions to the mechanical problems that may arise.

Thanks to all who have put up with my antics over the years and allowed me the opportunity to be a part of this scientific effort. NEKAAL has produced a large quantity of useful data on asteroids that may endanger the earth and we have credit for discovery of 0.1% of **all** the known minor planets along the way.