

# SETI telescope array suspends operations due to financial constraints

April 26 2011, by Bob Yirka

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(PhysOrg.com) -- SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence group that has been using radio telescopes since the 1960's to "listen" for signals from deep space that could prove the existence of other life in the universe, has had to temporarily suspend operation of its Allen Telescope Array, (ATA) due to a lack of funding.

Built in 2007, at a cost of \$50 million (half of which came from its namesake, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen), the array, located north of San Francisco, is comprised of 42 dishes and is connected to 64 quad-core Dell 6100 servers, donated by Dell, Google, and Intel, that sift through 100 to 200TB of data each day in hopes of finding a sign of non-terrestrial signals.

The array has been put into hibernation mode, with a skeleton crew to keep it from deteriorating, while SETI looks for new sources of cash. Until now, its operating funds have come from the state of California (the University of California, Berkeley is responsible for operating the ATA) the National Science Foundation, NASA and other private donors. But as California and the rest of the nation suffered through hard economic times, so too did SETI as donations dwindled and budgets were cut. So, instead of adding more dishes (350 were originally planned) and putting the source code for the data scanning algorithms on the “cloud” via Amazon, the group is instead scrambling to simply stay alive.

Tom Pierson, CEO of the SETI Institute, which is based in Mountain View, California, broke the news in an open letter to donors, posted April 22; and Franck Marchis, astronomer and a Principal Investigator for SETI, confirmed the mothballing of the ATA on his blog. The news was not unexpected, however, as SETI has seen its donations over the past two years, literally dry up and disappear.

[In his blog](#), Marchis, mentions that the ATA is used for more than just alien searching; it’s been used to study all sources of intergalactic radio wave sources, for example and has been used to help with the study of black holes and other unexplained phenomena. He also notes that the U.S. Air Force is interested in using the array to help track space debris, and if so, the hope is that some type of sharing arrangement can be worked out, at least until [SETI](#) finds another donor with very deep pockets.

**More information:** [www.seti.org/ata](http://www.seti.org/ata)

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