

NASA Reinstates the Dawn Mission

March 27 2006

NASA senior management announced a decision Monday to reinstate the Dawn mission, a robotic exploration of two major asteroids. Dawn had been canceled because of technical problems and cost overruns. The mission, named because it was designed to study objects dating from the dawn of the solar system, would travel to Vesta and Ceres, two of the largest asteroids orbiting the sun between Mars and Jupiter. Dawn will use an electric ion propulsion system and orbit multiple objects.

The mission originally was approved in December 2001 and was set for launch in June 2006. Technical problems and other difficulties delayed the projected launch date to July 2007 and pushed the cost from its original estimate of \$373 million to \$446 million. The decision to cancel Dawn was made March 2, 2006, after about \$257 million already had been spent. An additional expenditure of about \$14 million would have been required to terminate the project.

The reinstatement resulted from a review process that is part of new management procedures established by NASA Administrator Michael Griffin. The process is intended to help ensure open debate and thorough evaluation of major decisions regarding space exploration and agency operations.

"We revisited a number of technical and financial challenges and the work being done to address them," said NASA Associate Administrator Rex Geveden, who chaired the review panel. "Our review determined the project team has made substantive progress on many of this mission's technical issues, and, in the end, we have confidence the mission will

succeed."

Source: NASA

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