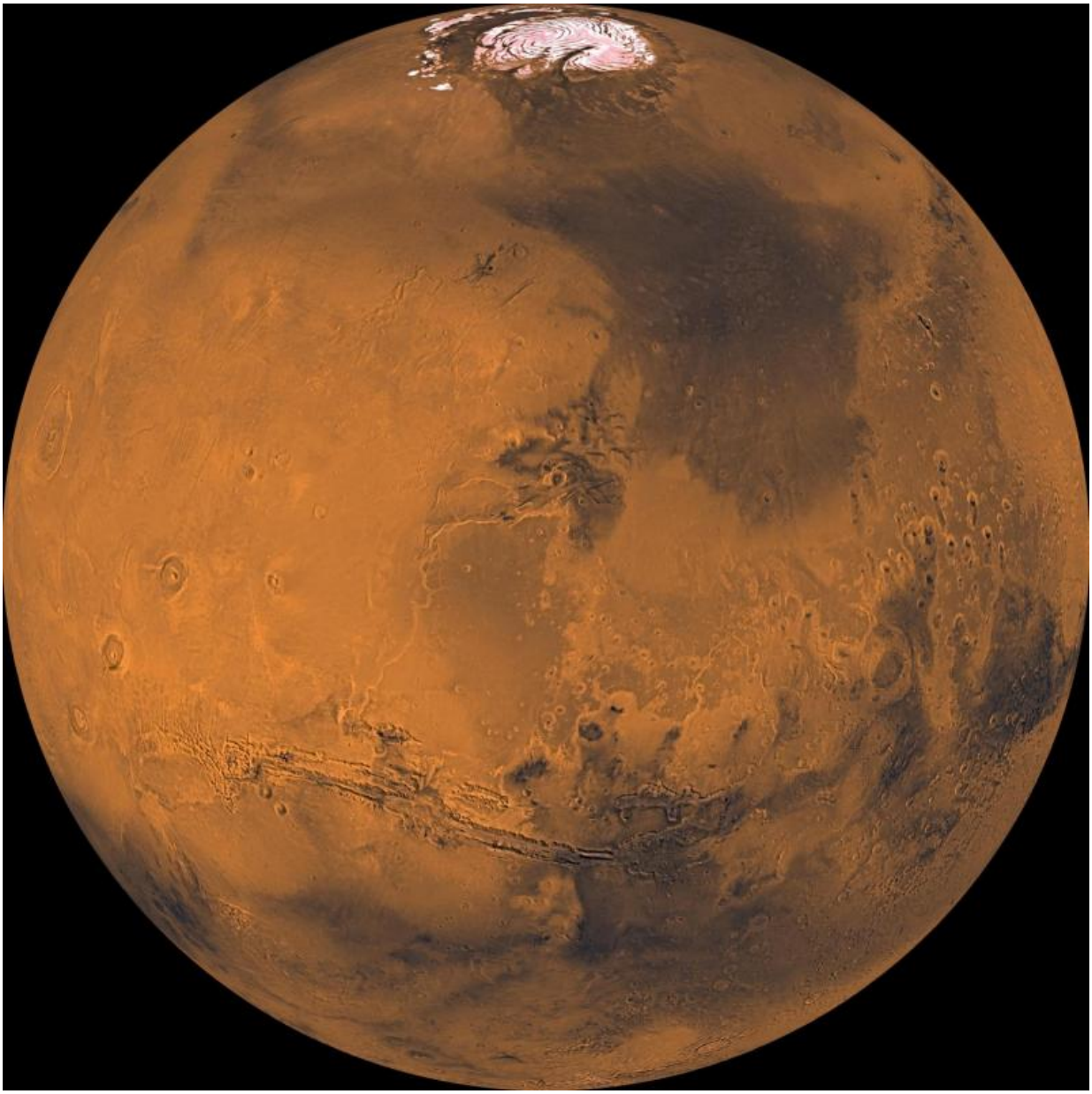
NASA selects five Mars orbiter concept studies

July 19 2016, by Guy Webster



NASA's Mars Exploration Program includes two active rovers and three active orbiters. Concept studies have begun for a potential future Mars orbiter mission. Credit: NASA/JPL/USGS

NASA has selected five U.S. aerospace companies to conduct concept studies for a potential future Mars orbiter mission. Such a mission would continue key capabilities including telecommunications and global high-resolution imaging in support of the agency's Journey to Mars.

The companies contracted for these four-month studies are: The Boeing Company in Huntington Beach, California; Lockheed Martin Space Systems in Denver; Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems in Redondo Beach, California; Orbital ATK in Dulles, Virginia; and Space Systems/Loral in Palo Alto, California.

"We're excited to continue planning for the next decade of Mars exploration," said Geoffrey Yoder, acting associate administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate in Washington.

The concept studies will address how a potential new Mars orbiter mission could best provide communications, imaging and operational capabilities. They also will assess the possibilities for supporting additional scientific instruments and functionalities, in addition to optical communications. The orbiter concept under study would take advantage of U.S. industry's technology capacities by using solar electric propulsion to provide flexible launch, mission and orbit capabilities.

The Mars Exploration Program Analysis Group, an organization designed to provide input to NASA from the Mars research science community, published a report six months ago on recommended science objectives for a Mars orbiter. These studies will provide input for

assessing the feasibility of addressing these objectives. NASA also is pursuing partnership interest in contributing to this potential mission.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, is managing the concept studies under the direction of the agency's Mars Exploration Program.

NASA is on an ambitious Journey to Mars that includes sending humans to the Red Planet in the 2030s. The agency's robotic spacecraft are leading the way, with two active rovers, three active orbiters, the planned launch of the InSight lander in 2018, and development of the Mars 2020 rover.

More information: For more information about NASA's Journey to Mars, visit www.nasa.gov/journeytomars

Provided by Jet Propulsion Laboratory