

Help nickname New Horizons' next flyby target

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Artist's concept of NASA's New Horizons spacecraft flying by a possible binary 2014 MU69 on Jan. 1, 2019. Early observations of MU69 hint at the Kuiper Belt object being either a binary orbiting pair or a contact (stuck together) pair of nearly like-sized bodies with diameters near 20 and 18 kilometers (12 and 11 miles). Credit: NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute/Carlos Hernandez

NASA's New Horizons mission to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt is looking for your ideas on what to informally name its next flyby destination, a billion miles (1.6 billion kilometers) past Pluto.

On New Year's Day 2019, the New Horizons spacecraft will fly past a small, frozen world in the Kuiper Belt, at the outer edge of our solar system. The target Kuiper Belt object (KBO) currently goes by the official designation "(486958) 2014 MU69." NASA and the New Horizons team are [asking the public for help](#) in giving "MU69" a nickname to use for this exploration target.

"New Horizons made history two years ago with the first close-up look at Pluto, and is now on course for the farthest planetary encounter in the history of spaceflight," said Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate in Washington. "We're pleased to bring the public along on this exciting mission of discovery."

After the flyby, NASA and the New Horizons project plan to choose a formal name to submit to the International Astronomical Union, based in part on whether MU69 is found to be a single body, a binary pair, or perhaps a system of multiple objects. The chosen nickname will be used in the interim.

"New Horizons has always been about pure exploration, shedding light on new worlds like we've never seen before," said Alan Stern, New Horizons principal investigator from Southwest Research Institute in Boulder, Colorado. "Our close encounter with MU69 adds another chapter to this mission's remarkable story. We're excited for the public to help us pick a nickname for our target that captures the excitement of the flyby and awe and inspiration of exploring this new and record-distant body in space."

The naming campaign is hosted by the SETI Institute of Mountain View,

California, and led by Mark Showalter, an institute fellow and member of the New Horizons science team. The website includes names currently under consideration; site visitors can vote for their favorites or nominate names they think should be added to the ballot. "The campaign is open to everyone," Showalter said. "We are hoping that somebody out there proposes the perfect, inspiring name for MU69."

The campaign will close at 3 p.m. EST/noon PST on Dec. 1. NASA and the New Horizons team will review the top vote-getters and announce their selection in early January.

Telescopic observations of MU69, which is more than 4 billion miles (6.5 billion kilometers) from Earth, hint at the Kuiper Belt object being either a binary orbiting pair or a contact (stuck together) pair of nearly like-sized bodies – meaning the team might actually need two or more temporary tags for its target.

"Many Kuiper Belt Objects have had informal names at first, before a formal name was proposed. After the flyby, once we know a lot more about this intriguing world, we and NASA will work with the International Astronomical Union to assign a formal name to MU69," Showalter said. "Until then, we're excited to bring people into the mission and share in what will be an amazing flyby on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, 2019!"

To submit your suggested names and to vote for your favorites, go to: <http://frontierworlds.seti.org>.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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