COSMIC: Expanding the search for extraterrestrial intelligence

January 8 2024

In a groundbreaking cosmic quest, the SETI Institute's Commensal Open-Source Multimode Interferometer Cluster (COSMIC) at the Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) is expanding the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI).

This cutting-edge technology is not a distinct telescope; it's a detector. COSMIC searches for extraterrestrial signals and paves the way for future science using a copy of the raw data from the telescope's observations. At the heart of COSMIC's mission is pursuing the age-old question: Are we alone in the universe? Project scientist Dr. Chenoa Tremblay and the team detailed the project in a paper published in The Astronomical Journal.

What sets COSMIC apart is its adaptability to the future. The system is designed for future upgrades, ensuring it remains at the forefront of cosmic exploration. With the potential to expand its capabilities, COSMIC could soon cover more stars, explore new frequencies, and enhance our understanding of the vast cosmic tapestry.

It is important to note that COSMIC's capabilities go beyond searching for extraterrestrial intelligence. Future upgrades could unlock new explorations, from finding fast radio bursts with a submillisecond temporal resolution to studying spectral line science and axionic dark matter.

"COSMIC introduces modern Ethernet-based digital architecture on the
VLA, allowing for a test bed for future technologies as we move into the
next generation era," said Tremblay.

"Currently, the focus is on creating one of the largest surveys for
technological signals, with over 500,000 sources observed in the first six
months. However, the flexibility of the design allows for a wide range of
other scientific opportunities, such as studying fast radio burst pulse
structures and searching for axion dark matter candidates."

"We hope to open opportunities for other scientists to use our high time
(nanoseconds) or our high spectral resolution (sub-Hz) to complete their
research. It is an exciting time for increasing the capabilities of this
historic telescope."

COSMIC stands on the shoulders of giants like Project Phoenix, with the
capacity to search millions of stars and the potential to expand to tens of
millions—a leap in scope and sensitivity. Currently operational on the
VLA, COSMIC is searching using observations from the Very Large
Array Sky Survey (VLASS), which will map 80% of the sky in three
phases over two years and catalog approximately 10 million radio
sources.

COSMIC's Ethernet-based system adds a new collaborative element to
the cosmos. The multicasting technology allows other commensal
systems to access COSMIC's processing power, enabling a collaborative
scientific ecosystem to develop. Imagine multiple telescopes working
together to unlock the universe's most profound mysteries.

"The COSMIC system greatly enhances the VLA's scientific capabilities.
Its main goal of detecting extraterrestrial technosignatures addresses one
of the most profound scientific questions ever. This topic was previously
impossible with the VLA," said Dr. Paul Demorest, National Radio
Astronomy Observatory.
"By operating in parallel with projects such as the VLA Sky Survey, COSMIC will accomplish one of the largest SETI surveys ever while still allowing the VLA to carry out its usual program of other astronomical research."

As we embark on this cosmic journey with COSMIC, the possibilities are as vast as the universe. Whether searching for signals from distant civilizations or unraveling the mysteries of dark matter, COSMIC is not just a detector on a telescope; it is a cosmic companion in our quest for knowledge.


Provided by SETI Institute

Citation: COSMIC: Expanding the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (2024, January 8) retrieved 15 August 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2024-01-cosmic-extraterrestrial-intelligence.html

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