



going to see something that dates back to the formation of the solar system."

New Horizons will fly about three times closer to MU69 than it did to Pluto in July 2015, allowing the spacecraft's cameras to provide a more detailed look at the object's surface. Project Scientist Hal Weaver, of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in Laurel, Maryland, pointed out that New Horizons' vantage point from about 2,175 miles (3,500 kilometers) from MU69 will allow it spot details about the size of a basketball court.

"Combining images with the measurements we make of the composition of and environment around MU69, should teach us a great deal about objects like MU69 that built dwarf planets like Pluto," Weaver said.

The MU69 flyby is the centerpiece of the current New Horizons extended mission that also includes observations of more than two-dozen other Kuiper Belt objects, as well as measurements of the plasma, gas and dust environment of the Kuiper Belt. "This post-Pluto mission is a complete and comprehensive exploration of the Kuiper Belt," said Alice Bowman, New Horizons mission operations manager, also from APL. "The spacecraft is collecting data out there throughout each year while the mission team works together to plan and shape the MU69 flyby."

New Horizons is currently in hibernation until June 4. After that wake-up and a check of the spacecraft's systems and science instruments, the MU69 encounter begins in mid- August, with the first attempts at long-distance observations of MU69 that the team will use to navigate the spacecraft along the flyby path.

Provided by NASA

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