

NASA is considering a long-term mission to Pluto, building on the success of the New Horizons mission that flew past the dwarf planet in 2015. The agency has funded the Southwest Research Institute (SwRI) to study the feasibility and costs of a potential Pluto orbiter mission. The mission concept involves a spacecraft orbiting Pluto for two Earth years before exploring other Kuiper Belt Objects (KBOs) and dwarf planets. Previous studies have shown that this mission is possible with current technology and propulsion systems. The Pluto orbiter would use gravity assists from Pluto's moon Charon to navigate back into the Kuiper Belt. This study is part of NASA's preparation for the next Planetary Science Decadal Survey, which sets exploration priorities. New Horizons continues to operate and could potentially explore additional KBOs if NASA approves further mission extensions.