

Small Next-generation Atmospheric Probe Concept (SNAP)

*Kunio M. Sayanagi¹, Robert A. Dillman², David H. Atkinson⁴, Sarag Saikia⁷, Amy A. Simon³, Thomas R. Spilker⁶, Michael H. Wong⁵, Drew J. Hope²

1. Hampton University, 2. NASA Langley Research Center, 3. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, 4. NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 5. University of California, Berkeley, 6. Independent Consultant, 7. Purdue University

We present a concept for a small atmospheric probe that could be flexibly added to future missions that orbit or fly-by a giant planet as a secondary payload, which we call the Small Next-generation Atmospheric Probe (SNAP). SNAP's main scientific objectives are to determine the vertical distribution of clouds and cloud-forming chemical species, thermal stratification, and wind speed as a function of depth. As a case study, we present the advantages, cost and risk of adding SNAP to the future Uranus Orbiter and Probe flagship mission; in combination with the mission's main probe, SNAP would perform atmospheric in-situ measurements at a second location, and thus enable and enhance the scientific objectives recommended by the 2013 Planetary Science Decadal Survey and the 2014 NASA Science Plan to determine atmospheric spatial variabilities.

We envision that the science objectives can be achieved with a 30-kg entry probe ~0.5m in diameter (less than half the diameter of the Galileo probe) that reaches 5-bar pressure-altitude and returns data to Earth via the carrier spacecraft. As the baseline instruments, the probe will carry an Atmospheric Structure Instrument (ASI) that measures the temperature, pressure and acceleration, a carbon nanotube-based NanoChem atmospheric composition sensor, and an Ultra-Stable Oscillator (USO) to conduct a Doppler Wind Experiment (DWE). While SNAP is applicable to multiple planets, we examine the feasibility, benefits and impacts of adding SNAP to the Uranus Orbiter and Probe flagship mission.

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