



## 6742 - The evolving activity drivers in a newly discovered distant comet

Cycle: 3, Proposal Category: DD

### INVESTIGATORS

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### OBSERVATIONS

<i>Folder</i>	<i>Observation</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>Observing Template</i>	<i>Science Target</i>
C2024E1-5AU				
	4	epoch2	NIRSpec IFU Spectroscopy	(1) C2024E1
	5	epoch2-SKY	NIRSpec IFU Spectroscopy	(2) C2024E1-sky

### ABSTRACT

We propose NIRSPEC IFU observations to map, for the first time, the gases driving cometary activity over a range of heliocentric distances. The newly discovered comet C/2024 E1 (Wierzchos) is currently over 7 au from the Sun, beyond the distance where water-ice sublimation dominates cometary activity, and is observable at three key epochs over the next 16 months, before it makes a relatively close perihelion passage at 0.6 au in

2026. We propose to observe it at around 7, 5, and 3 au inbound to map the gas species in the coma when the comet is outside, crossing, and within the water-ice sublimation boundary, respectively. NIRSPEC IFU is uniquely capable of simultaneously detecting the major species in cometary comae (H<sub>2</sub>O, CO<sub>2</sub>, CO) at these distances, giving us a first look at the evolution of activity in a primitive comet as it approaches the Sun. This new comet presents a rare opportunity to get such observations, which are crucial to study the poorly understood process of cometary activity, and also critical for planning for the ESA mission Comet Interceptor as it prepares to encounter a similar object.

## **OBSERVING DESCRIPTION**

We propose to observe the newly discovered comet C/2024 E1 (Wierzchos) at three epochs as it approaches the Sun. This is a new long period comet that was discovered quite far from the Sun (8 au) but will approach to around 0.6 au at its perihelion in 2026, when it is expected to be highly active and easy to study from the ground. JWST is required to study it when it is further away, to measure how its activity evolves, and in particular to measure abundances of the main activity-driving gases in the coma, which cannot be observed from the ground. We will use NIRSpec IFU spectroscopy to cover the wavelength range 1-5 microns, which includes emission bands from all three key species in the activity of comets (H<sub>2</sub>O, CO<sub>2</sub>, CO). The IFU mode is useful for the extended cometary coma, allowing us to map its structure, and also to increase our total signal-to-noise by integrating over a larger area. Each observation is accompanied by an offset sky observation due to the extended nature of the comet coma (which will fill the IFU field of view). At the most distant epoch we will use the prism mode to achieve the necessary S/N in a reasonable integration time, and focus on the primary activity drivers. As the comet brightens as it gets closer we will use medium resolution gratings G235M and G395M to cover the necessary wavelength range with increased spectral resolution, to better separate emission features of the primary activity drivers from those of minor species in the coma such as CH<sub>4</sub>, which are expected to contribute more at closer distances.

We propose to observe the comet at around 7, 5, and 3 au from the Sun. These distances are outside, crossing, and within the point where water-ice sublimation is expected to dominate cometary activity, and are observable in the 2024 visibility window (May until July) and at the beginning and end of the 2025 window (March to August), respectively. Depending on exact scheduling, these observations fall within Cycle 2/3 (7 au, in 2024), in Cycle 3 (5 au, early 2025) and Cycle 3/4 (3 au, mid 2025).

Proposal 6742 - Targets - The evolving activity drivers in a newly discovered distant comet

Solar System Targets	#	Name	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
	(1)	C2024E1	TYPE=COMET,Q=0.5654444847023498,E=1.000048 914491765,I=75.23593911470061 ,O=108.095549584178,W=243.6498813703911,T=20- JAN- 2026:17:23:14,TTTimeScale=TDB,EQUINOX=J2000,E POCH=11-OCT-2024:00:00:00,EpochTimeScale=TDB		
<i>Comments: Extended=YES</i>					
(2)	C2024E1-sky	TYPE=COMET,Q=0.5654444847023498,E=1.000048 914491765,I=75.23593911470061 ,O=108.095549584178,W=243.6498813703911,T=20- JAN- 2026:17:23:14,TTTimeScale=TDB,EQUINOX=J2000,E POCH=11-OCT-2024:00:00:00,EpochTimeScale=TDB	TYPE=POS_ANGLE,RAD=300,ANG=90,REF=SUN		
<i>Comments: Extended=YES</i>					

Proposal 6742 - Observation 4 - The evolving activity drivers in a newly discovered distant comet

Thu Mar 27 20:00:09 GMT 2025

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Proposal 6742, Observation 4: epoch2</b> <b>Diagnostic Status: Warning</b> Observing Template: NIRSpec IFU Spectroscopy Background Observations:[epoch2-SKY (Obs 5)]											
	(Visit 4:1) Warning (Form): Overheads are provisional until the Visit Planner has been run. (epoch2 (Obs 4)) Informational (Form): The Visit Planner and Spike may produce different schedulability results.											
<b>Diagnosics</b>												
<b>Solar System Targets</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Level 1</b>				<b>Level 2</b>				<b>Level 3</b>	
	(1)	C2024E1	TYPE=COMET,Q=0.5654444847023498,E=1.000048 914491765,I=75.23593911470061 ,O=108.095549584178,W=243.6498813703911,T=20- JAN- 2026:17:23:14,TTimeScale=TDB,EQUINOX=J2000,E POCH=11-OCT-2024:00:00:00,EpochTimeScale=TDB  <i>Comments: Extended=YES</i>									
<b>Template</b>	<b>TA Method</b>						<b>HFF Readout Mode</b>					
	NONE						false					
<b>Dithers</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Dither Type</b>		<b>Size</b>	<b>Starting Point</b>			<b>Number of Points</b>	<b>Points</b>			
	1	4-POINT-DITHER										
<b>Spectral Elements</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Grating/Filter</b>	<b>Readout Pattern</b>	<b>Groups/Int</b>	<b>Integrations/Exp</b>	<b>Leakcal</b>	<b>Dither</b>	<b>Autocal</b>	<b>Total Dithers</b>	<b>Total Integrations</b>	<b>Total Exposure Time</b>	<b>ETC Wkbk.Calc ID</b>
	1	G235M/F170LP	NRSIRS2RAPI D	15	1	false	true	NONE	4	4	933.689	
	2	G395M/F290LP	NRSIRS2RAPI D	40	1	false	true	NONE	4	4	2392.578	
<b>Special Requirements</b>	Between Dates 16-APR-2025:00:00:00 and 30-APR-2025:00:00:00  Sequence Observations 4, 5, Non-interruptible  DEFAULT WINDOW: ANGULAR RATE C2024E1 FROM JWST LESS THAN 0.075											

Proposal 6742 - Observation 5 - The evolving activity drivers in a newly discovered distant comet

Thu Mar 27 20:00:09 GMT 2025

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Proposal 6742, Observation 5: epoch2-SKY</b> <b>Diagnostic Status: Warning</b> Observing Template: NIRSpec IFU Spectroscopy Background Observation For: [epoch2 (Obs 4)]											
	(Visit 5:1) Warning (Form): Overheads are provisional until the Visit Planner has been run. (epoch2-SKY (Obs 5)) Informational (Form): The Visit Planner and Spike may produce different schedulability results.											
<b>Diagnostics</b>												
<b>Solar System Targets</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Level 1</b>				<b>Level 2</b>				<b>Level 3</b>	
	(2)	C2024E1-sky	TYPE=COMET,Q=0.5654444847023498,E=1.000048 914491765,I=75.23593911470061 ,O=108.095549584178,W=243.6498813703911,T=20- JAN- 2026:17:23:14,TTimeScale=TDB,EQUINOX=J2000,E POCH=11-OCT-2024:00:00:00,EpochTimeScale=TDB  <i>Comments: Extended=YES</i>				TYPE=POS_ANGLE,RAD=300,ANG=90,REF=SUN					
<b>Template</b>	<b>TA Method</b>						<b>HFF Readout Mode</b>					
	NONE						false					
<b>Dithers</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Dither Type</b>		<b>Size</b>		<b>Starting Point</b>		<b>Number of Points</b>		<b>Points</b>		
	1	4-POINT-NOD										
<b>Spectral Elements</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Grating/Filter</b>	<b>Readout Pattern</b>	<b>Groups/Int</b>	<b>Integrations/Exp</b>	<b>Leakcal</b>	<b>Dither</b>	<b>Autocal</b>	<b>Total Dithers</b>	<b>Total Integrations</b>	<b>Total Exposure Time</b>	<b>ETC Wkbk.Calc ID</b>
	1	G235M/F170LP	NRSIRS2RAPI D	15	1	false	true	NONE	4	4	933.689	
	2	G395M/F290LP	NRSIRS2RAPI D	40	1	false	true	NONE	4	4	2392.578	
<b>Special Requirements</b>	Sequence Observations 4, 5, Non-interruptible											
	DEFAULT WINDOW: ANGULAR RATE C2024E1-sky FROM JWST LESS THAN 0.075											