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Diamond, Shuttle Set For July Launch Attempt

The Legendary Sky Project Will Celebrate Historic Journey

(YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES) The Legendary Sky Diamond is expected to make its historic debut in space this weekend when Canadian Space Agency Astronaut Julie Payette flies aboard Space Shuttle Endeavour, scheduled for launch on Saturday evening.

The Legendary Sky Diamond is part of The Legendary Sky Project, a multi-year education and outreach initiative dedicated to collecting and preserving northern sky knowledge and heritage.

For this weekend's first launch attempt, scheduled for 7:39 p.m. EST on July 11, the Ground Umbilical Carrier Plate that led to the cancellation of two launches on June 13 and June 17 is not expected to be a major concern. A test on the fueling system passed with flying colours last week, setting the stage for this weekend's launch attempt. A bigger factor may be the weather near Cape Canaveral, which is often unstable at this time of year.

"July is often a stormy month in Florida, and this year has been no exception," says James Pugsley, President of Astronomy North who returned to Florida to document another launch attempt despite the forecast. "A launch that is delayed because of the sky doesn't delay the project, it just adds to the legendary journey and story of this diamond."

The Legendary Sky Diamond is a 2.89 carat rough stone discovered at the De Beers Snap Lake Mine near Yellowknife. Like most diamonds on Earth, the age of this rare stone is estimated between 925 million and 4.25 billion years old. Pugsley describes the diamond as an educational treasure for the children of the Northwest Territories.

"Using this ancient stone from the centre of our planet we can bring exciting new opportunities for students in the North to learn about the natural history of Earth and the nature and culture of Canada's northern sky."

He says the project will establish a new appreciation for traditional perspectives of the sky, and acknowledges there is plenty of important work ahead, work that goes far beyond Florida's stormy summer.

"Our young people have limited access to information about the northern sky because most of the textbooks in northern classrooms are written for students in southern Canada," says Pugsley. "Through the development of new community-specific resources for northern teachers and students we can help northern children develop a lifelong connection to the sky they see every day and night."

Upon completion of the mission, the diamond will be donated by Astronomy North to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, where it will begin its educational legacy as part of The Legendary Sky Exhibit, scheduled to open later this year.

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