

SPACE LAUNCH SYSTEM

MAY – JULY 2026 HIGHLIGHTS

**ARTEMIS III:
HUMANITY'S
NEXT STEP
TOWARD THE
MOON**

NASA MARCHES TOWARD ARTEMIS III MISSION IN 2027, NAMES CREW MEMBERS

Taking another step toward one of the most complex human spaceflight missions in recent history, NASA unveiled new details about Artemis III and announced the mission's crew members: Randy Bresnik as commander, Luca Parmitano as pilot, and Frank Rubio and Andre Douglas as mission specialists. Bob Hines will serve as the backup crew member.

For the Artemis III mission, the astronauts will undertake a series of challenging tests in low Earth orbit to prepare for Artemis IV, the first crewed mission to the lunar South Pole in 2028.

During Artemis III, the agency's SLS rocket will launch the Orion spacecraft and its crew from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida to low Earth orbit. After the crew checks out Orion's systems, the spacecraft will demonstrate rendezvous and docking capabilities with test versions from one, or both, American commercial human landing systems in development by Blue Origin and SpaceX. This highly-choreographed mission includes a dramatic multi-launch campaign of the world's most powerful rockets, testing integrated hardware between Orion and the landers, including system interfaces, software, propulsion, and communications.

The crew will begin training immediately on Orion spacecraft systems, as well as assist in the development and operations of the test versions of Blue Origin and SpaceX landers.

Read more: go.nasa.gov/4ysQdXS



The Artemis III crew poses for an official portrait (from left: Luca Parmitano, Andre Douglas, Randy Bresnik, Frank Rubio).

NASA OUTLINES PRELIMINARY ARTEMIS III MISSION PLANS

NASA is moving quickly to define next year's Artemis III mission in Earth orbit, a crewed flight that will test rendezvous and docking capabilities between the agency's Orion spacecraft and commercial landers from Blue Origin and SpaceX. Since a February announcement adding an Artemis mission ahead of crewed landing missions to the Moon's South Pole region, engineers have been evaluating mission profile options and operational considerations for Artemis III to ensure the test flight helps the agency and its partners reduce risk ahead of the next Americans landing on the Moon during Artemis IV.

The mission is planned to carry out a series of objectives designed to demonstrate critical systems needed for a future lunar landing. During the Artemis III mission, the SLS rocket will launch the Orion spacecraft from NASA's Kennedy

Space Center in Florida with four crew members. Instead of using the interim cryogenic propulsion stage as the upper stage of the rocket, NASA will use a spacer without propulsion capabilities as a representation of the overall upper stage dimensions. The spacer will maintain the same overall dimensions and interface connection points as the upper stage between the Orion stage adapter and launch vehicle stage adapter.

Design and fabrication activities for the spacer are progressing rapidly at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Material for the barrel section and the upper and lower rings is currently being machined at Marshall in preparation for upcoming welding operations.

Read more: go.nasa.gov/4quQRyx



The Sun rises behind NASA's Artemis II SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft on top of a mobile launcher at Launch Complex 39B at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida March 30, 2026.

FINAL ARTEMIS III SLS BOOSTER SEGMENTS EN ROUTE TO NASA KENNEDY

The final booster motor segments for NASA's SLS rocket that will help propel Artemis III astronauts on their journey to space shipped from Northrop Grumman's Railyard Shipping Facility in Corinne, Utah, June 2. The eight booster motor segments are on their way to NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida where they will form the SLS rocket's twin, five-segment solid rocket boosters, which produce more than 75% of the total thrust at liftoff.

Manufactured by SLS booster lead contractor Northrop Grumman in Utah, the solid rocket boosters have three major assemblies with the motor segment being the largest portion of the booster. Together, the SLS rocket's

twin boosters and the core stage's four RS-25 engines produce more than 8.8 million pounds of thrust. The eight booster motor segments travel in specialized transporters to the spaceport.

Artemis III will launch four astronauts from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida aboard the Orion spacecraft on the SLS rocket. The mission will test critical rendezvous and docking capabilities between Orion and commercial human landing systems needed to deliver astronauts to the lunar surface on future missions.

Read more: go.nasa.gov/4poe1rG



A train transports eight booster motor segments for the SLS (Space Launch System) rocket that will power NASA's Artemis III mission.

NASA'S ARTEMIS III FLIGHT HARDWARE STACKS UP AT KENNEDY

It is full steam ahead at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida as teams process and assemble flight hardware in preparation for the upcoming crewed Artemis III mission.

Less than three months after the safe return of the Artemis II crew, teams began stacking the twin SLS solid rocket booster segments inside Kennedy's Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) in July, beginning with the left-hand aft assembly. The remaining segments were shipped via train to Kennedy in June, and they will be inspected, processed, and coated at the center's Rotation, Processing, and Surge Facility and then placed into lift stands for further processing. Upon completion, teams will transport

each remaining booster segment from the facility to the VAB to stack on top of the mobile launcher that has undergone repairs since the agency's Artemis II launch.

In parallel, SLS core stage processing is underway inside the VAB, and in May, teams connected the four-fifths rocket stage with its engine section. The first two RS-25 engines arrived at the VAB in June, and once all four engines arrive and are processed, teams will work to install them to complete the core stage for integration atop the mobile launcher and support testing and launch operations.

Read more: go.nasa.gov/4fn7skt



The left-hand and right-hand aft assembly solid rocket booster segments for NASA's Artemis III SLS rocket are secured to the mobile launcher at the agency's Vehicle Assembly Building at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Saturday, July 11, 2026.

NASA SEEKS INTEREST FOR ARTEMIS MISSION CUBESATS

Organizations interested in launching CubeSats on future Artemis missions were encouraged to respond to NASA's request for information (RFI) in early June.

The RFI will inform potential future opportunities for CubeSats to fly on Artemis III, IV and V. While NASA is reviewing specific mission profiles, the agency expects to accommodate 6U- and 12U-sized CubeSats that would deploy in Earth orbit or on a heliocentric disposal trajectory following the separation of the Orion spacecraft from the rocket, as the nanosatellites would deploy from a ring on the upper stage of the rocket. Opportunities may also exist for CubeSats deployed on a reentry trajectory from Earth orbit.

NASA flew ten CubeSats on the uncrewed Artemis I mission in 2022 and four on the crewed Artemis II mission, deploying each after the upper stage detached from the spacecraft and Orion was flying free on its own to carry out its primary mission. In addition to providing a ride to space as secondary payloads, the agency provides payload integration and engineering support.

Read more: [go.nasa.gov/4ts01P0](https://www.nasa.gov/4ts01P0)



Two of the Artemis II CubeSats can be seen in the lower portion of the Orion stage adapter on the right side of the image.

I AM ARTEMIS: *ELKIN NORENA*

NASA's Elkin Norena has helped the agency launch more than a dozen space shuttle missions – that's more than a dozen crews to low Earth orbit and more than a dozen historic missions. They were missions that helped build the International Space Station, that provided a final servicing mission to the Hubble Space Telescope, and that performed critical science experiments that improved life right here on Earth.

Today, he continues that work as the manager of the Resident Management Office for SLS at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, helping launch America's rocket,

the SLS, and the Orion spacecraft with its international quartet of astronauts on the Artemis II mission to fly by the Moon and return home.

"When that clock ticks down to T-10 minutes, everybody's just waiting," Norena said. "You wait for the automated system to kick in. You hold your breath and watch the clock go down to T-0. Then BOOM, launch happens, and you know it was all worth it."

Read more: go.nasa.gov/3MUVgxb



Elkin Norena, who serves as an SLS resident management officer at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, stands in front of an RS-25 engine.

I Am Artemis stories bring to life the stories of the men and women who make the Artemis missions a reality.

See all the profiles here: go.nasa.gov/4bltEp5

WHAT'S NEW IN SLS SOCIAL MEDIA

ALL ABOARD!

Eight of the 10 solid rocket booster segments for NASA's Artemis III mission recently made the cross-country trip from Utah to NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida by rail.

In celebration of America's 250th anniversary, the Union Pacific's new locomotive, No. 4547, was the engine responsible for delivering the hardware that will help power the next Artemis mission.

Read more: go.nasa.gov/6LVChwc



IT'S ALL COMING TOGETHER!

All four RS-25 engines that will help launch the Artemis III mission have arrived at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

A recent time-lapse video follows one of the towering engines as it was carefully lifted and placed into storage. With each major component arriving and being processed for flight, Artemis III is another step closer to launch.

Watch here: go.nasa.gov/3BWSeja



SLS ON THE ROAD

REACHING READERS NATIONWIDE

In June, the SLS team traveled to Chicago to support NASA's exhibit at the American Library Association (ALA) Conference & Exhibition. At the world's largest library event, the team introduced the SLS rocket and shared free educational resources that could be incorporated into exhibition attendees' curriculum.



THE GREAT AMERICAN STATE FAIR

In July, the SLS team supported an agency-wide exhibit at the Great American State Fair, a 16-day national exposition held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., as part of the nation's 250th anniversary celebration.



SPACEFLIGHT PARTNERS:

Northrop Grumman

LOCATION: Falls Church, Virginia

WHAT THEY DO FOR SLS:

Northrop Grumman supports the Artemis campaign by overseeing the production of the twin five-segment solid rocket boosters and the booster separation motors for the SLS rocket. The company also oversees production of the attitude control motor and launch abort motors for Orion spacecraft's Launch Abort System.



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What's SLS in 3... 2.. 1. ?

Welcome to "SLS in 3... 2.. 1.," the newsletter that connects you to the latest news and resources related to NASA's SLS (Space Launch System) rocket. Want to know more about NASA's heavy-lift rocket and the Artemis campaign?

With "SLS in 3... 2.. 1.," you're only a few clicks away. — [Learn more](#)

Top Three Countdown

What you need to know right now

- 3... I Am Artemis** — Discover the unique lives of the people who support Artemis. NASA's Elsin Noreña has helped the agency launch more than a dozen space shuttle missions — that's more than a dozen crews to low Earth orbit and more than a dozen historic missions. — [Read more](#)
- 2.. Rockets and Railcars** — The final booster motor segments for NASA's SLS rocket for Artemis III recently shipped from Northrop Grumman's Raytheon Shipping Facility in Corinne, Utah, and arrived at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. — [Read more](#)
- 1. The Next Crew** — On June 9, 2026, NASA announced the four-member crew and backup astronaut selected for the Artemis III mission. — [Read more](#)

Picture of the Month

We know how to wow



On June 8, 2026, eight of the 10 solid rocket booster motor segments for NASA's SLS rocket for Artemis III arrived at a rail yard near the agency's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, joining the mission's two completed aft assemblies.
NASA/Brandon Hancock

FOLLOW THE PROGRESS OF NASA'S NEW LAUNCH VEHICLE FOR DEEP SPACE:

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