Sediments within the icy North Polar Deposits of Mars record recent Impacts and Volcanism

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November 26, 2022

Abstract

The North Polar Layered Deposits (NPLD) of Mars are ice-rich sedimentary layers that formed under the influence of Mars' modern climate and thus record the recent climatic history of Mars, analogous to terrestrial ice sheets. The 2013-2023 Planetary Science Decadal Survey recommends a lander mission to sample the NPLD for climatic records; however, linking the geologic record to the climatic history will require quantitative dating of the NPLD. In this study we use orbital reflectance spectroscopy to show for the first time that dateable mafic lithics are present throughout the NPLD. We find significant glass as well as diverse crystalline minerals, which suggests that surface processes like impacts and volcanism were active during the late Amazonian and transported sediments from across the planet to the north pole. In situ investigation of the NPLD will thus provide critical quantitative constraints on both the recent geologic and climatic histories of Mars.

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1	Sediments within the icy North Polar Deposits of Mars record recent Impacts
2	and Volcanism
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6	Key Points:
7 8	• CRISM spectra show crystalline and glass-rich mafic sediments are present throughout the north polar layered deposits
9 10	• Composition, grainsize, and heterogeneity of sediments suggest impact and volcanic sources
11 12	• These non-dust lithics within the north polar deposits are suitable for in-situ dating of ice cores and constraining climate models

13 Abstract

The North Polar Layered Deposits (NPLD) of Mars are ice-rich sedimentary layers that formed 14 under the influence of Mars' modern climate and thus record the recent climatic history of Mars, 15 analogous to terrestrial ice sheets. The 2013-2023 Planetary Science Decadal Survey 16 recommends a lander mission to sample the NPLD for climatic records; however, linking the 17 geologic record to the climatic history will require quantitative dating of the NPLD. In this study 18 we use orbital reflectance spectroscopy to show for the first time that dateable mafic lithics are 19 present throughout the NPLD. We find significant glass as well as diverse crystalline minerals, 20 21 which suggests that surface processes like impacts and volcanism were active during the late Amazonian and transported sediments from across the planet to the north pole. In situ 22 23 investigation of the NPLD will thus provide critical quantitative constraints on both the recent geologic and climatic histories of Mars. 24

25 Plain Language Summary

Mars' north polar cap accumulated over last few millions of years due to seasonal buildup of 26 frost trapping atmospheric gases and incoming sediments, thereby preserving the history of 27 Mars' recent climate in the form of an ice-rich geologic record. Characterizing the contents of 28 these deposits is essential to understand the role of geologic and climatic processes recently 29 active on Mars. The Mars scientific community recommends robotic exploration of these icy 30 north polar deposits to sample the ice and extract climate records. This study uses a novel 31 technique to determine the composition of sediments entrained in ice by analyzing the properties 32 of reflected light from the icy surface which is captured using an imaging spectrometer from 33 orbit. A diverse suite of iron-bearing minerals are detected within sediments eroding from the icy 34 deposits, which we hypothesized were sourced from recent impacts and volcanic eruptions that 35 36 deposited sediments over the north polar region. Therefore, processes like impacts and volcanism influenced the formation of the north polar deposits. Because the sediments from these sources 37 38 are dateable, they can be used to determine the age of its ice-rich climate records and thus the timescales of climate change on another planet. 39

40 **1 Introduction**

The polar caps of Mars are the only known modern climate record preserved beyond 41 Earth (Smith et al., 2020). At the north pole, the icy North Polar Layered Deposits (NPLD; 42 Figure 1) cap the massive polar plateau, Planum Boreum (Tanaka et al., 2008). The NPLD 43 formed during the late Amazonian period, perhaps as recently as 5 Mya, when variations in the 44 obliquity of Mars caused differences in insolation, leading to periodic accumulation and ablation 45 of volatiles and dust on the poles (Cutts, 1973; Levrard et al., 2007; Schultz & Lutz, 1988; Toon 46 et al., 1980). These deposits are over 3 km thick and contain thousands of layers, each containing 47 a record of surface processes and atmospheric state at the time of deposition (Becerra et al., 48 2017; Fishbaugh et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016). In situ exploration of these deposits for climate 49 records is a crucial next step towards advancing the field of planetary climatology (Smith et al., 50 2020). Quantitatively linking this NPLD geologic record to the climatic history will require firm 51 age constraints on its ice-rich sedimentary layers, however, it is unknown if materials suitable for 52 quantitative geochronology exist within the NPLD. 53



Figure 1: (*a*) Locations of studied CRISM images of NPLD exposures over Mars Orbiter
Camera albedo map (NASA/MSSS) showing bright north polar ice cap surrounded by the dark
sand sea. (*b*) HiRISE image showing color-coded geologic units at Boreum Cavus in Chasma
Boreale. (*c*) General stratigraphy of the north polar plateau, Planum Boreum.

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In terrestrial ice core studies, younger ice cores are dated by counting annual layers and 60 dating trapped gasses. But as ice gets older, it loses its annual layers and trapped gases are lost 61 62 due to subsequent melting, compaction, and diffusion, which increase the uncertainty in the measured ages (Buizert et al., 2014). Therefore, radiometric dating and/or exposure dating of 63 dateable lithic sediment, such as volcanic ash from volcanic eruptions or impact ejecta layers 64 (Basile et al., 2001), entrained in the icy layers is used to constrain the absolute age of the layers. 65 But lithics within the NPLD have previously been assumed to be composed of globally 66 homogenized airfall dust, which is of unknown origin and age. While some models suggest that 67 other more easily datable sediments may exist within the NPLD (Bouška & Bell III, 1993; 68 Kerber et al., 2012), orbital investigations of the composition of the NPLD have focused on 69 hydrated minerals (Horgan et al., 2009; Massé et al., 2010, 2012) and ice grain size (Calvin et al., 70 71 2009), so it is unknown whether or not the NPLD contain primary mafic silicates that could indicate dateable volcanic or impact deposits. This study utilizes CRISM high resolution orbital 72 visible/near-infrared hyperspectral images of exposed strata at peripheral scarps and interior 73 troughs in the NPLD, to constrain for the first time the composition, origin, and distribution of 74 75 dark non-ice materials in the NPLD and to test whether or not the NPLD contain suitable materials for quantitative geochronology. 76

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2 Spectral Diversity in the NPLD

For details of spectral analysis (Tables S3 and S4: spectral data), see methods section in
supplementary information, and see Figure 1a and Table S1 for location of CRISM sites.
Figures 2, S2, and S3 show CRISM images and their RGB color-composite maps generated
using standard CRISM spectral parameters (Viviano-Beck et al., 2014) as listed in Table S2.



Figure 2: (*a*) CRISM approximate natural color images (See Figure 1a for location; Figures 3
and 4 for labeled spectra), labeled with NPLD stratigraphic units, are paired with RGB colorcomposites of CRISM summary products BD530 (red), BDI1000VIS (green), and HCPINDEX2
(blue). The spectral parameters measure absorptions at 0.53, 1, and 2 µm which here are
indicative of ferric-dust, glass, and HCP, respectively. (*b*) When projected over MOLA elevation
model, HRL0000B69E shows a trough whose equatorward facing slope is dust-dominated
whereas the poleward facing slope displays strong mafic signatures.

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CRISM spectra of NPLD outcrops exhibit signatures due to both water ice and lithic 91 materials, including airfall dust and mafic minerals. NPLD lithics fall into 4 distinct spectral 92 classes (Figure 3). After ratioing to bright icy and dusty regions in the same scene (Figure S4: 93 spectral processing approach), spectra from regions dominated by nanophase ferric iron oxide in 94 martian dust (Type 1) are spectrally featureless and exhibit strong red spectral slopes (Morris et 95 al., 1997). In contrast, ratio spectra of most dark-toned sediments show broad absorption bands at 96 both 1 and 2 µm, indicative of the presence of iron in mafic minerals. Spectra with broad 97 absorption bands centered between 0.95-1.05 µm and near 2.1 µm are consistent with high-Ca 98 pyroxene (HCP; Type 2; Cloutis & Gaffey, 1991; Horgan et al., 2014), and are similar to regions 99 within the Olympia Undae portion of the circumpolar dune field (Horgan & Bell, 2012). Spectra 100

with a more symmetric band centered beyond 1.08 µm and a second band near 2.1 µm are
consistent with iron-bearing (e.g., basaltic) glass, possibly mixed with some HCP (Type 3;
Horgan & Bell, 2012).



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Figure 3: (*Left*) Lab spectra of Fe-bearing minerals (Cloutis & Gaffey, 1991; King & Ridley,
 1987; Minitti et al., 2002; Morris & Lauer Jr, 1990). (*Middle*) CRISM ratio spectra of lithic
 sediments in the NPLD. (*Right*) CRISM continuum removed spectra clearly showing mafic
 absorption bands. Thick black spectra have been smoothed from underlying thin gray lines. See
 Figures 2 and S3 for spectra locations.

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Other dark sediments exhibit a broad 1 μm absorption band but show negligible
 absorption at 2 μm (Type 4). These spectra could either be consistent with olivine or some

glasses, such as tektites or obsidian, which show little to no $2 \mu m$ band (Figure 3). Olivine 113 displays a broad iron absorption band centered beyond 1 um that can usually be distinguished 114 from glass based on its strong shoulder near 1.25 µm, but the absorption band can become 115 rounded to resemble glass upon substitution by other metals, mostly magnesium (King & Ridley, 116 1987). Glass spectra are sensitive to composition and cooling history (Minitti et al., 2002), and 117 while glasses containing oxidized iron exhibit broad bands at both 1 and 2 µm, the 2 µm band is 118 significantly diminished in glasses dominated by reduced iron (Cannon et al., 2017). In the sand 119 sea surrounding the polar cap, spectra interpreted as glass exhibit weak or no 2 μ m bands 120 (Horgan & Bell, 2012). Thus, we hypothesize that spectra with a rounded (U-shaped) or narrow 121 (V-shaped) symmetrical 1 µm absorption centered beyond 1.07 µm without a 1.3 µm shoulder 122 are more consistent with glass, but may also be due to olivine or an olivine/glass mixture. 123 Spectra with a relatively asymmetric 1 µm absorption that are often more V-shaped with a 124 shoulder at 1.3 μ m and centered at shorter wavelengths (~1.05 μ m) are more consistent with 125 olivine (s12 Figure 4). 126

Many spectra exhibit strong blue-slopes superposed over these mafic bands (s10–s12, s20 **Figure 4**) but sometimes the mafic bands can be entirely absent (s15 **Figure 2b**, s6 **Figure 3**). We interpret these dark and blue-sloped spectra as consistent with weathered (leached) glass, as previously detected in Siton Undae and other areas throughout the north polar sand sea (Figure 3; Horgan & Bell, 2012; Minitti et al., 2007). Within the NPLD, all of the mafic spectral signatures can be attributed to these endmembers or their mixtures.



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Figure 4: (*Left*) Ratio spectra and (*right*) continuum removed spectra of mafic materials detected
within the lithic units of the NPLD. See Figures 2, S2, and S3 for spectra locations.

3 Composition of Geologic Units within the NPLD

Geologic studies using satellite imagery have mapped various ice-rich lithic units within
the NPLD (Figure 1b and 1c) and have constrained their stratigraphic relationships and possible
origins based on morphology (Tanaka et al., 2012). The uppermost unit, Planum Boreum 3
(ABb3), represents the ongoing deposition of volatiles in the current low obliquity period
(Landis et al., 2016). Lithics within ABb3 include lag deposits in ablation zones and wind-blown

sediments eroding from underlying unit ABb1. Reflectance spectra of these areas are
characterized as moderately dusty and dominated by water ice, however, ratio spectra either
show weak mafic absorption bands (band depths less than 2%; s13 and s14 Figure 2b; s7 and s8
Figure 4) or steep blue-slope with no absorption band consistent with weathered glass (s15
Figure 2b). Absorption band centers for these spectra vary between 1.00 - 1.12 µm with little to
no 2 µm absorption, indicating glass or olivine (Type 4: V) possibly mixed with some pyroxene
(Type 2).

149 Planum Boreum 2 (ABb2) is a dark-toned sedimentary unit also known as the north polar 150 "veneers", which may represent an unconformity within the NPLD. ABb2 is interpreted as either a distinct mantling deposit or an ablation lag, and the modern extent is likely due to wind 151 152 transport toward the periphery of the polar cap (Rodriguez et al., 2007). Reflectance spectra from ABb2 are free of water ice absorptions and have low reflectance values indicating low dust 153 154 cover. Upon ratioing, ABb2 spectra generally exhibit a strong blue sloped and concave-up shape, with a broad and symmetric 1 µm band centered at wavelengths longer than 1.07 µm and a 155 156 shallow 2 µm band (s10 and s12 Figure 4; Type 4: U&V). These properties are consistent with a mixture dominated by weathered glass. Occasionally, spectra consistent with pyroxene (Type 2) 157 and unweathered glass (Type 3) are detected within the ABb2 unit (s3 Figure 3; s9 and s11 158 Figure 4). 159

160 The unit forming most of the NPLD is the Planum Boreum 1 unit (ABb1) which is composed of thousands of meter-scale, horizontally stacked, and ice-rich layers, totaling up to 161 162 1500 m thick. Reflectance spectra from ABb1 contain the strongest dust signatures, possibly because each layer is a result of cyclic deposition and ablation processes, concentrating the 163 seasonal dust as well as any deposited lithics, which makes them ideal targets for extracting 164 climate records. While dust dominates (Type 1), ratio spectra with mafic absorption bands are 165 also observed in ABb1 unit, primarily spectra without 2 µm bands that have V-shaped 166 absorptions centered beyond 1.08 µm consistent with glass or olivine (Type 4; s5 Figure 3). 167 Other spectra with 2 µm absorption bands exhibit glass-like absorptions (Type 3; s17 Figure 4). 168

At lower elevations, the NPLD grades into the basal Cavi (ABbc) unit that is
hypothesized to have formed during the Middle to Late Amazonian period (Tanaka et al., 2012).
ABbc is marked by low albedo aeolian cross strata of water ice-cemented sandy material,

hypothesized to be an ancient polar dune field, which are inter-bedded with bright pure ice layers 172 that may be remnants of ancient polar caps (Fishbaugh & Head, 2005; Tanaka et al., 2008). 173 174 Spectrally, ABbc is less dusty and icy than overlying units, and therefore displays the strongest mafic signatures among all the NPLD units. However, the signatures vary significantly even 175 within local outcrops. Strong HCP (Type 2) absorption bands (s2 Figure 3 and s18 Figure 4) are 176 observed, as well as both V- and U-shaped 1 μ m absorptions beyond 1.075 μ m (Type 4; s19 and 177 s20 in Figure 4) with little to no 2 µm absorption band indicating the presence of glass or olivine 178 (s15-s17 Figure 4). Finally, strongly blue-sloped spectra with no mafic bands consistent with 179 weathered glass are also detected (s6 Figure 3). 180

The Rupes (ABbr) unit contains the oldest north polar sediments and forms most of the basal unit of the north polar deposits, which might have once been a 'paleo-plateau' (Tanaka et al., 2008). Early to Late Hesperian in age, Rupes is composed of layers of ice and fine-grained material over a kilometer thick, hypothesized to have been eroded and transported from the Scandia region (Tanaka et al., 2008, 2012). Surface spectra of Rupes appear dust and ice free, with a broad and symmetric absorption band at 1.1 μ m and negligible absorption at 2 μ m, most consistent with glass (Type 4; s4 **Figure 3**).

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4 Volcanic and Impact Sediments within the NPLD

While glass and weathered glass signatures are the most widespread, mafic minerals like 189 190 pyroxene, and likely olivine, are also common within the NPLD which suggests diverse sources and depositional processes. Mafic materials within the NPLD are broadly similar to those 191 detected in the surrounding sand sea, but the mineralogy of lithics within the NPLD is spatially 192 193 heterogenous, unlike the surrounding sand seas (Horgan & Bell, 2012). Diverse lithics eroding 194 from NPLD troughs and scarps become well-mixed during aeolian transport into the sand seas, making it appear spectrally homogenous over vast expanse (Ewing et al., 2010; Tanaka et al., 195 196 2008). However, it is unlikely that the reverse case is true, that the NPLD lithics are aeolian 197 sediments sourced from these dune fields or the surrounding plains. Wind models suggest that strong katabatic winds drive transport down off the cap and not up onto it (Smith & Spiga, 198 2018), so sediment is more likely to be emplaced onto the NPLD either ballistically or via 199 200 atmospheric fallout. Compositional similarities to the surrounding plains may thus be due to both deposition of the same materials regionally and because the NPLD is a source of sediment for the 201

plains. The heterogeneity of the NPLD lithics also supports diverse origins unrelated to the sand
 sea. In particular, detection of olivine-like signatures within the NPLD suggests that at least
 some materials are sourced from far distances, since olivine signatures are only detected in
 bedrock or sediments on the surrounding plains at distances >1000 km (Salvatore et al., 2010).

206 We hypothesize that impact ejecta are a major source for mafic sediments in the NPLD. Impacts are frequent on Mars even today and are expected to ballistically deposit sediments 207 locally and globally (Daubar et al., 2013). Proximal impact ejecta would contain a large fraction 208 of diverse local country rock (e.g., pyroxene) and variable amounts of impact glass, with a grain-209 size decreasing with distance from the impact. Proximal ejecta could thus form locally thick 210 impactite mantling layers over the NPLD, and we hypothesize that the ABb2 dark sedimentary 211 212 mantle could be such an impactite deposit. Distal impacts would produce globally distributed mm to tens of cm thick layers of sand-sized glass (microtektites) or partially crystalline 213 214 (microcrystites) spherules (Bouška & Bell, 1993). For example, a 15 km diameter crater can produce a global average of 40 microtektites per square centimeter (Lorenz, 2000). The iron in 215 216 distal impact spherules is reduced during vaporization, causing a weaker 2 µm band consistent with Type 4 glassy spectra (Figure 2b, 3 and 4) observed within the NPLD. Larger tektites can 217 be either glassy (Types 3 or 4) or crystalline (Type 2, pyroxene; Type 4, olivine) depending on 218 their cooling history (Johnson & Melosh, 2014; Schultz & Mustard, 2004), therefore, distal 219 220 ejecta could thus produce a mix of glassy and crystalline sand size mafic grains throughout the NPLD, consistent with the mafic sedimentary lags that we observe at the NPLD outcrops. 221

222 Mafic sediments at the NPLD could also be ash deposits sourced from volcanic eruptions. While the existence of volcanic edifices in the northern lowlands is controversial (Garvin et al., 223 2000), more distant sources could also have deposited ash, transported by atmospheric 224 suspension and dispersed to distant locations by global atmospheric circulation (Kerber et al., 225 2012). Volcanic tephra can be crystalline or glass-rich, where glass abundances are significantly 226 enhanced by water/ice interactions during eruption (Henderson et al., 2021; Wall et al., 2014). 227 228 However, coarse (sand and larger) tephra is only deposited close to the source. Climate models suggest that only the finest-grained volcanic ash (particle size $\sim 1 \mu m$) can be latitudinally 229 230 transported from the mid-latitudes and beyond to the poles, especially at low modern 231 atmospheric densities (Kerber et al., 2012). Since no known major volcanoes are located at 232 northern high-latitudes, any volcanic ash in the NPLD will account for a small volume of

sediment forming at least millimeter thick layers upon continued eruption over millions of years
(Kerber et al., 2012). The most recent large volcanic eruptions on Mars are thought to have
occurred only 1 to a few 10s of million years ago (Hartmann & Berman, 2000; Márquez et al.,
2004; Neukum et al., 2004) so evidence of their eruption may exist within the NPLD.

237 In either case, NPLD would contain a unique record of the eruption and impact history of Mars during the late Amazonian, and sediments from these sources could provide both 238 compositional markers for establishing stratigraphy across the region, as well as dateable 239 minerals within the layers for quantitative geochronology using techniques like ⁴⁰Ar-³⁹Ar dating 240 (Basile et al., 2001; Buizert et al., 2014). However, any landed mission analyzing the sediments 241 for geochronology must consider the impact of local reworking of NPLD layers and sediments 242 resulting from trough migration (Smith et al., 2013). Therefore, landing sites for these missions 243 must target least impacted stratigraphic horizons. Extracting ice cores and constraining dates for 244 245 climate records will provide better constraints on the effects of astronomical forcing (Levrard et al., 2007) and stochastic processes like impacts (Perron & Huybers, 2009) on planetary 246 climatology, as well as substantially improve our understanding of modern sediment sources on 247 Mars, the evolution of the martian interior, and the recent impact flux at Mars (Banfield et al., 248 2020). 249

5 Significance of dust and non-dust lithics in the NPLD

The NPLD are typically modeled as a simple mixture of ice and martian airfall dust 251 (containing nanophase ferric oxides with other amorphous and crystalline minerals; Ehlmann et 252 253 al., 2017), varying from \sim 95% ice to up to \sim 50% dust, based on radar models and spectral observations (Calvin et al., 2009; Lalich et al., 2019). However, this simple model is inconsistent 254 with detections of coarse-grained mafic sediment, which suggests that lithics are entrained within 255 the NPLD through a combination of dust falling on the surface, deposits of lithic sediments 256 257 sourced from impacts and volcanic eruptions, and ablation, leading to stratigraphic variations in the concentration of both types of lithics. 258

Airfall martian dust is the largest and most continuous source of refractory lithic material to the NPLD. Atmospheric dust changes energy flux in the atmosphere which has the potential to be a major internal driver of climate variations on Mars (Kahre et al., 2017). These climatic variations can alter the atmospheric state and thereby its ability to access different reservoirs of dust across the planet. Hence, the concentration and composition of dust in the NPLD may
 provide records of major dust events or cycles, and may reflect temporal variations in dust
 composition and characteristics sourced from different regions of Mars under changing climatic
 conditions.

Although the NPLD contains mafic materials, the nature of their occurrence varies. The 267 RGB spectral parameter color-composite images in **Figure 2** show that the NPLD (unit ABb1 in 268 red) forming upper Planum Boreum is comprised of a stack of icy layers and thin ablation lags 269 that are ferric-dust rich with minor and spatially variable components of both crystalline and 270 glass-rich mafic sediments that we interpret as sourced from impacts and volcanism. The 271 underlying Cavi unit (ABbc in blue/green) is sand-rich and dominated by locally heterogeneous 272 273 mafic sediments. The heterogeneity suggests that the Cavi is not just well-mixed sands similar to and perhaps sourced from the surrounding dune fields, and that it may contain materials from 274 275 ballistic sources as well. The polar veneers (ABb2 in green) that mantle the NPLD are dominated by much more homogeneous glass-rich materials. The homogeneity suggests that this unit could 276 277 either represent a deposit from a distinct mantling event or an ablation lag reworked by aeolian processes to concentrate sand-sized glassy materials. 278

279 Concentration of coarse glassy sediments during ablation of the NPLD appears to be actively occurring today in the north polar troughs (Figure 2b). Solar insolation and katabatic 280 winds erode the equatorward-facing slope (magenta in Figure 2b), blowing away fine-grained 281 ferric-dust and lithic fragments and concentrating reworked coarse glass-rich sediments 282 (green/blue in Figure 2b) at the trough bottom and over the poleward facing slope. This 283 observation strongly supports an ablation lag origin for the similarly glass-rich and sand-size 284 sediments of the veneers/ABb2 unit, which we hypothesize contains significant abundances of 285 coarse glassy grains originating as distal impact spherules, possibly from a large number of 286 impact events. Determining the range of ages of sediments in this unit could thus provide both an 287 important stratigraphic marker within the NPLD and a critical constraint on the impact flux at 288 289 Mars during the Amazonian.

Past mantling by impact ejecta, ash, a dust event, or an ablation lag has major
implications for the thermal stability, strength of the stratified structure, and the age of ice at the
NPLD (Levrard et al., 2007; Smith, 2020; Sori et al., 2016). The presence of lithics other than

dust may increase the thickness and insulating properties of sublimation lag deposits, which
controls ablation rates of underlying ice, and hence, the time taken to build or remove the layers
forming the NPLD. For example, the ABb2 dark sedimentary unit could represent a major lag
that once covered the NPLD, which may have increased the stability of the NPLD during the
most recent periods of high obliquity.

Lithics in the NPLD also record the recent history of water activity at the north pole. 298 Detection of weathered glass, which if altered in situ, suggests water activity in the recent past of 299 the NPLD. At the low temperatures of the NPLD, liquid water brines can persist as thin film 300 301 surrounding lithic sediments which causes acid leaching of cations and forming weathering rinds on the surface of glassy sediments (Chemtob et al., 2010; Minitti et al., 2007). The NPLD and 302 303 surrounding regions are known to contain sulfates (Horgan et al., 2009; Massé et al., 2010, 2012) and other salts (Toner et al., 2014), that may have formed by alteration of lithics surrounded by 304 305 ice-brine slush or episodic interactions with groundwater. The degree of aqueous activity is perhaps controlled by climate change caused by astronomical forcing or due to discrete 306 307 stochastic events related to impacts or volcanic eruptions, which would have directly influenced the habitability of Mars' polar terrains. 308

309 6 Conclusions

Our analysis shows a significant concentration of lithics other than airfall ferric-dust 310 throughout the NPLD, and detections include both glass and crystalline mafic minerals. Glasses 311 are a dominant material throughout the NPLD suggesting that impact ejecta such as distal impact 312 spherules has been a major source of sand-sized sediment. Volcanic ash is likely to be present 313 but primarily as very fine-grained sediments. Thus, this study demonstrates that along with 314 martian dust cycles, geologic processes like impacts and volcanic eruptions during the late 315 Amazonian influenced formation of the NPLD by depositing material from regional and global 316 317 sources. The role of these stochastic geological processes and subsequent reworking over the polar cap, due to ablation and aeolian activity, must be factored into radar and climate models to 318 improve estimates of the NPLD's physical properties and timing of accumulation. The presence 319 of dateable sediments within the NPLD make it an excellent site for assessing recent rates of 320 321 impacts and volcanic activity, and carrying out a first paleoclimate study using landed robotic

- asset on another planet that is devoid of climate complicating factors such as oceans, biology,
- 323 etc. (Smith et al., 2020).

324 Acknowledgments

- 325 This research was funded by Future Investigators in NASA Earth and Space Science and
- Technology (FINESST) award number 80NSSC19K1535.

327 **Open Research**

- CRISM images are available on NASA's Planetary Data System (PDS) Geoscience Node archive (<u>https://pds-geosciences.wustl.edu/missions/mro/crism.htm</u>). All spectral data and processing details are included in the supporting documents.
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