

Dark Skies

Key Takeaways

- Access to natural night skies is increasingly recognized as a valuable asset
- Rural communities, due to their distance from dense urban centers, often have night skies free of light pollution
- Local efforts are needed to protect these night skies from light pollution sources

Overview

Gateway and natural amenity region (GNAR) communities have recently emerged as national and international leaders in protecting and preserving the night sky. Many of these communities value the night sky as an important component of their cultural heritage and rural character. They understand the public health benefits of regulating their lights during the nighttime hours. Additionally, as light pollution encroaches on starry views in the world's metropolitan areas, GNAR communities see economic opportunity in urbanites' rising interest in astro-tourism.

There are many approaches a GNAR community can take in order to preserve its night sky. GNAR communities throughout the western United States have adopted exterior lighting ordinances, have carried out exterior lighting assessments of publicly-owned fixtures, have partnered with astronomical groups and universities to study their light pollution contributions, and have worked with the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) to receive special recognition for their efforts.

Case Studies

Moab, Utah and Grand County, Utah have recently undertaken initiatives to preserve and protect their region's night sky. Details of how they created their successful dark skies group and how they conducted their assessment of the publicly-owned exterior lighting fixtures are contained in the following case studies.

Creating a Successful Local Dark Skies Group

Communities interested in creating their own dark skies initiative can benefit from organizing a local dark skies group made up of community leaders and residents. The Moab Area Dark Skies Group has been a strong proponent of dark sky advocacy in Moab, UT. They have been the driving force in protecting and restoring the town's nightscape.

Conducting an Exterior Lighting Assessment

Becoming aware of the status of exterior lighting is a first step a community can take towards protecting the night sky. Grand County, UT had few records of where its exterior lighting fixtures were located and of what the status of those fixtures was. Working closely with a team of graduate students from the University of Utah, the county was able to conduct an exterior lighting assessment to gauge how its streets, parks, and public buildings were being lit and how its lighting could be improved to make the county more dark sky-friendly.

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