



INSIGHTS ON ACHIEVING INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY COMMUNITY CERTIFICATION

- OVERVIEW REPORT -

Where there's a will, there's a way

Insights on achieving International Dark Sky Community Certification – An overview of survey results submitted by 18 International Dark Sky Communities in January 2025

By Lisa Stoner, Coordinator for the Colorado Plateau and Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperatives

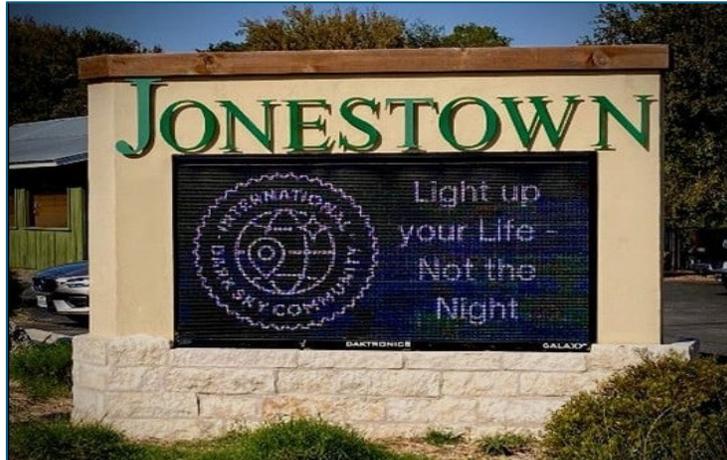
Navigating the path to an [International Dark Sky Place](#) certification may have its challenges, but it's worth it for many reasons, according to DarkSky certified community representatives from across the United States. "Just do it," was a common refrain made by those responding on behalf of their International Dark Sky Community, in a [survey](#) sent to them by the Dark Sky Cooperatives' Communications Team at the start of the year. The purpose of the survey was to identify the economic perspectives, challenges, and points of inspiration that supported their decision and process to become DarkSky certified, and to share the insights gained with others who may be considering a similar a DarkSky certification for their own community.

The survey was sent to 37 U.S.-based [International Dark Sky Communities](#) (IDSC) that were formally recognized at that time - early January 2025. Responses came in from seven states, including AZ, CO, FL, IL, OR, TX, and UT, submitted by 19 representatives from 18 communities - nearly half (48.6%) of all U.S.-based IDSC certified at the time. Seven of the reporting communities were certified prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2011 to 2019. Eleven were post-pandemic, certified between 2021 to 2025, with the majority in the last 2 years. The DarkSky advocates who responded included a range of professionals including town or village manager, town planner, economic development officer, natural resources specialist, and community volunteers with or without a personal background in astronomy.

When asked why their community pursued a DarkSky Certification, "*to align with the values of the community*," "*to protect the environment / wildlife*," and "*to protect the rural character of their town*" were equally the most common reasons reported by 17 out of 19 respondents. Although many of the questions were intentionally weighted towards getting an economic perspective, interestingly, only 2 of the 19 respondents reported an economic objective (via local taxes) as a primary reason for seeking this certification. All responses to this question are below:

- *To align with values of the community - 17 (89.5%)*
- *To protect the environment / wildlife - 17 (89.5%)*
- *To protect the rural character - 17 (89.5%)*

- For human health reasons - 8 (42.1%)
- To align with values of elected officials - 6 (31.6%)
- To align with values of key stakeholders - 6 (31.6%)
- For the economic (tax) return -2 (10.5%)
- For bringing the town back to life after having a negative past – we needed something new to be known for - 1 (5.3%)
- To support nearby observatories - 1 (5.3%)



A marquee in Jonestown, Texas, encouraging residents to “Light up your life, not the night.”
Photo Credit: [Jonestown Night Sky Advocacy](#)

In terms of the types of professional assistance utilized during the DarkSky application process, the top answers reported were having the support of a “dark sky consultant” (10 out of 19, 52.6%), and a “City/Community planner” (9 out of 19, 47.4%). Having a “DarkSky advocate” whether local or from DarkSky International, was also commonly reported. The types of professional assistance utilized were:

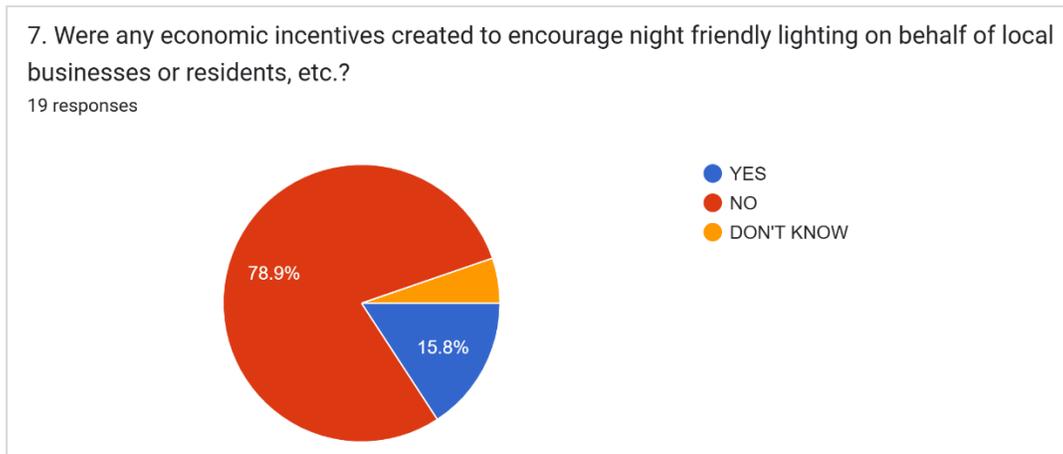
- Dark sky consultant – 10 (52.6%)
- City/Community planner – 9 (47.4%)
- Local DarkSky advocate – 5 (26.3%)
- DarkSky International support – 1 (5.3%)
- Night Sky Team member from a neighboring National Park unit – 1 (5.3%)
- Outdoor lighting designer – 1 (5.3%)
- Town Council – 1 (5.3%)

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

When asked, if any economic incentives were created to encourage night-friendly lighting for local businesses or residents, the majority said “no” indicating none existed (78.9%, or 15 of 19), 3 of 19 respondents said “yes” (15.8%), and 1 respondent said “did not know” (5.3%). The following details were also shared:

- Yes, A Commercial Building Improvement Grant Program was able to reimburse up to 50% of approved costs, with a maximum grant award of \$5,000 for improvements like exterior lighting upgrades consistent with Village Code (Village of Homer Glen, IL)
- Yes, By changing our town’s street lighting and associated fixtures, the town realized the energy cost savings in 1 year (Paonia, CO)

- *Yes, Not actually economic, but we have a Night Sky Friendly Business Program where we recognize the business on our website and also picture the business in the local newspaper (Cities of Wimberley and Woodcreek, of Wimberley Valley, TX)*
- *No, Not at this time, but as we approach the end of our grace period, we plan on initiating a matching fund plan to assist in the necessary changes. This will involve before-and-after pictures and a cursory inspection (Jonestown, TX)*
- *No, We offered retrofit lighting where lighting was deemed beneficial for all. (Crestone, CO)*
- *No, Not any economic benefits (yet), they are in the works (Antelope, OR)*



Breakdown of responses to survey question if economic incentives were created for local businesses and residents.

Regarding the funding sources used for outdoor lighting retrofits, the following comments were reported:

- *City/Town general funds*
- *We phased public lighting retrofits in our "other capital projects" budget*
- *City Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) Budget (i.e. small business loans)*
- *Hotel Occupancy Tax funds*
- *Grants*
- *Donations to local non-profit (e.g. the local Dark Skies group or other non-profit group)*
- *Private individuals (self-funding)*
- *Foundations*
- *Community-led Crowdfunding online platform (e.g. IOBY)*
- *NONE - we just took them down and turned some off*

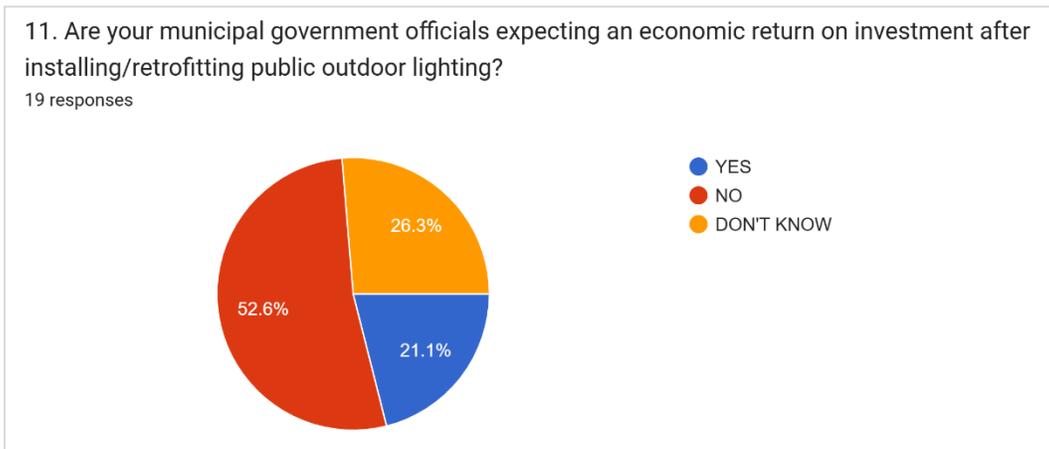
Regarding if an economic review had been done on potential cost benefits for installing or retrofitting night friendly lighting on public buildings, streetlights, etc., only one respondent said this had been done. Other details provided included:

- *Yes, While town advocates were in the process of convincing the town council to permit the retrofitting of lights, they learned, with the assistance of the local energy cooperative (Garkane Energy), the town would save approximately \$900 a year if they switched their high-pressure sodium streetlights to 3,000K LEDs (Torrey, UT)*
- *Of those who said, "no economic review had been done," some of those respondents indicated, "there were few or no municipal lights, and the financial gains were assumed to come from tourism primarily" (Crestone, CO), and*

“the city’s electrical usage was expected to decrease after all streetlights and city owned lights were changed within the city limits” (Jonestown, TX).

When asked if municipal government officials were expecting an economic return on investment after new public outdoor lighting fixtures were installed, the majority answered “no” (10 of 19, 52.6%), four said “yes” (21.1%), and five said “don’t know” (26.3%). Other details provided included:

- *Yes, it is tracked via the power bill the town pays to the energy cooperative - \$900 a year (Torrey, UT)*
- *Yes, lower energy costs are tracked via our Finance Department. Increase in traffic and retail expenditure are expected via tax returns. There is not a specific goal for returns, just implied expectations for lower energy costs, a safer environment with targeted lighting, and lower crime figures. (Jonestown, TX)*
- *Yes, for the historic district, the City Council voted to purchase dark sky street lighting instead of continuing to lease fixtures and poles from the utility provider. We expect long-term cost savings due to the energy efficiency of the dark sky fixtures and decision to purchase rather than lease the fixtures. (Groveland, FL)*
- *Yes, for sustainable tourism. No reported trends yet since we just received the certification but anticipate trends to be established 18-36 months from now. (Antelope, OR)*
- *No, It isn’t being tracked. Only random interactions with visitors reveals that some have come specifically for astro-tourism. Without an ongoing survey it’d be difficult to accurately ascertain the gained economic benefit. (Crestone, CO)*
- *No, The general thought is that the Dark Sky Certification helps drive ecotourism with unmeasured returns. (Sedona, AZ)*

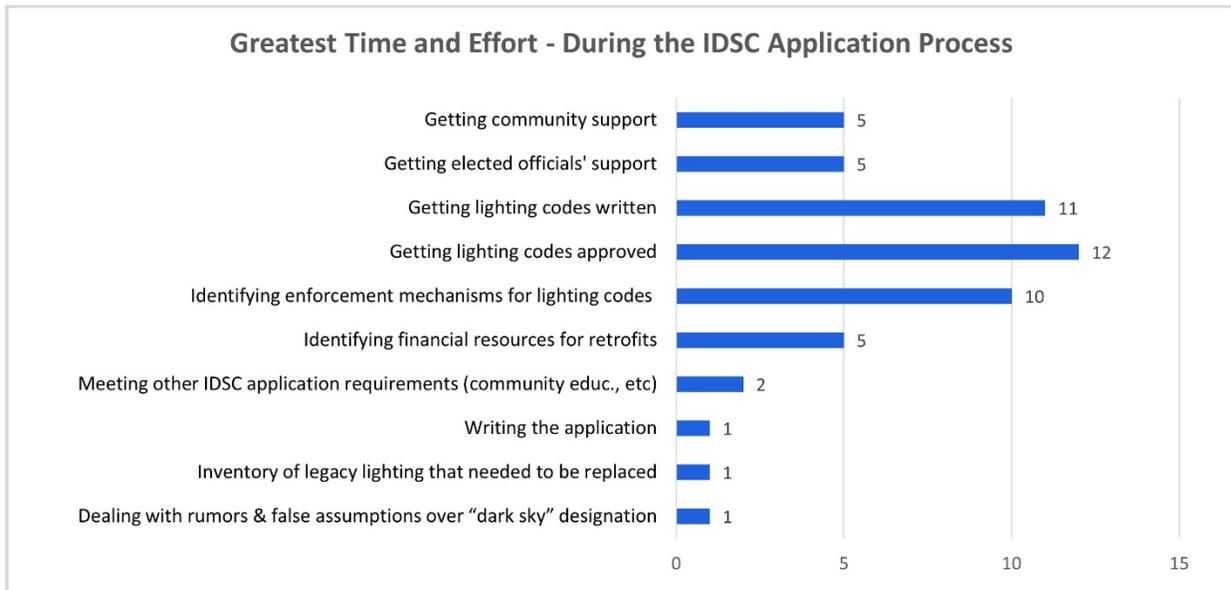


Breakdown of responses to survey question if the local municipal government was expecting an economic return from dark sky investments.

CHALLENGES

Regarding what took the greatest time and effort during the application process, respondents indicated “getting the lighting codes written” (11 of 19), “getting the lighting codes approved” (12 of 19), and “getting the lighting codes enforced” (10 of 19) were reported most frequently. “Getting the support of the community” (5 of 19), and “Getting the support of the elected officials” (5 of 19) and “finding financial resources to support retrofits” (5 of 19), were also reported by several communities. Other time-intensive tasks reported included “writing the application” (1), “fulfilling other application

requirements (e.g. community education)” (2), “inventorying legacy lighting” (1), and “dealing with false assumptions about dark sky designations” (1).



Breakdown of responses to survey question regarding what took the greatest time and effort during the International Dark Sky Community application process.

The development, revision, and enforcement of outdoor lighting codes were a challenge for many communities. Twelve out of the 18 communities (33.3%) indicated they had some form of outdoor lighting codes in place before starting the IDSC certification application process but were in need of “revision to meet DarkSky standards and make enforceable.”

Enforcement was handled by a mix of reactive and/or proactive approaches. Most communities utilized complaint-driven enforcement where city or county staff respond to reported violations rather than conduct routine inspections. Smaller and more rural communities with limited staff resources often relied on self-enforcement or county-level support in response to citizen complaints, which can have delayed response times in these situations.

More proactive approaches included enforcement of lighting codes at the time new building or constructions permits were issued and an inspection process that followed. In some cases, a dedicated Code Enforcement Officer were available to identify and address existing non-compliant fixtures, buildings, or structures. Several communities indicated they had or were in the process of updating their outdoor lighting codes at the same time as their town’s master planning document was in revision. This opportunity helped ensure the latest technical information for lighting was included in the town’s master plan and language that would improve enforceability.

Some municipalities used online systems to track complaints (i.e. anonymously reported non-compliance) and a graduated system of enforcement. Education and outreach (e.g. a letter with DarkSky educational materials), and technical assistance were commonly offered at the time of citation before moving to fines or punitive measures. Voluntary compliance was encouraged, with some imposing fines that escalated depending on duration of non-compliance.



Night Friendly Lighting, courtesy of [RAB Lighting](#) and the [Pennsylvania Outdoor Lighting Council](#)

Other self-reported “roadblocks” fell into three broad categories:

1. Getting & maintaining community support / False perceptions

- *Getting buy in from some local families, especially those whose ancestors founded the area*
- *We receive criticism from county residents who think our town is restricting free choice*
- *Community involvement / support has fallen off*
- *Too soon to know, but safety concerns and financial concerns are the biggest*

2. Lighting ordinance issues & enforcement

- *Codes that are difficult to enforce*
- *Getting the code in front of the County Board of Supervisors*
- *The city doesn't own its streetlights – negotiations were needed between the city and the utility company*
- *Current ordinance only regulates outdoor lighting. But light pollution from interior lighting is becoming an increasing problem as more structures with large windows and intense interior lighting are being built*

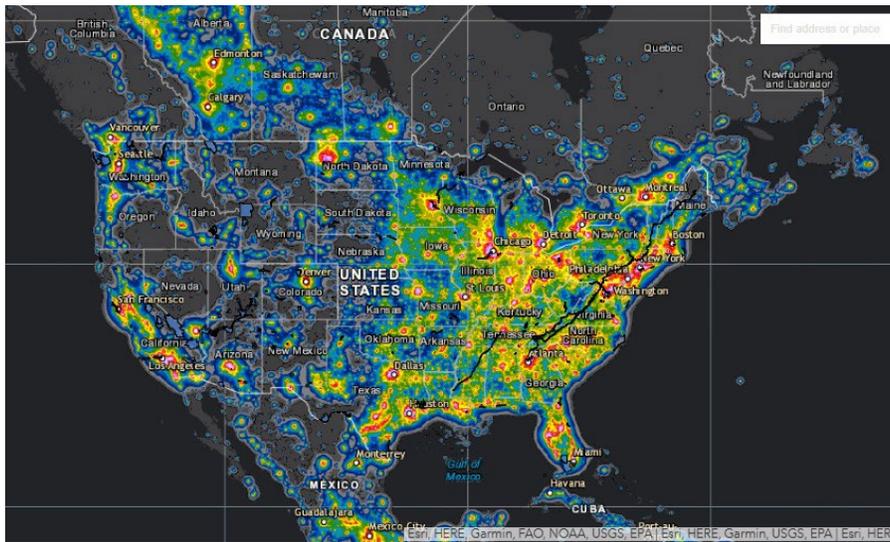
3. Availability of compliant light fixtures / Technical support

- *Hard to find commercially available light fixtures that comply with the Town's ordinance. Many property owners have resorted to custom modifications to bring lights fixtures into compliance.*
- *Limited experience and knowledge of dark sky lighting among local contractors, lighting experts, engineers, and installers*
- *Staff turnover during planning phases*
- *Needed more clarity from DarkSky International on what was expected for the IDSC Annual Report. They sent our report back a few times indicating it was insufficient before everything was straightened out.*

One respondent described all three roadblock categories in a single response:

- *After successfully completing the application to the Dark Sky Places program in 2023, we have now entered the implementation phase of the City's Dark Sky Initiative. Enforcing the City's relatively new outdoor lighting regulations requires the continued support of elected officials and the community. As the only IDSC in the state, many developers are unfamiliar*

with dark sky standards and the significance of light pollution. It will take careful stewardship and ongoing education to grow support of maintaining the Dark Sky Community certification and upholding the Dark Sky ordinance.



An interactive version of the New World Atlas of Artificial Night Sky Brightness (Falchi, F., et al., 2016) is available from the [Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences \(CIRES\)](#) at the University of Colorado Boulder.

POINTS OF INSPIRATION

Some final insights on what is required for a successful DarkSky certification emphasized 5 primary factors: commitment, patience, community education, open-mindedness, and well-written codes, as per the following statements:

1. It's a lot of work.

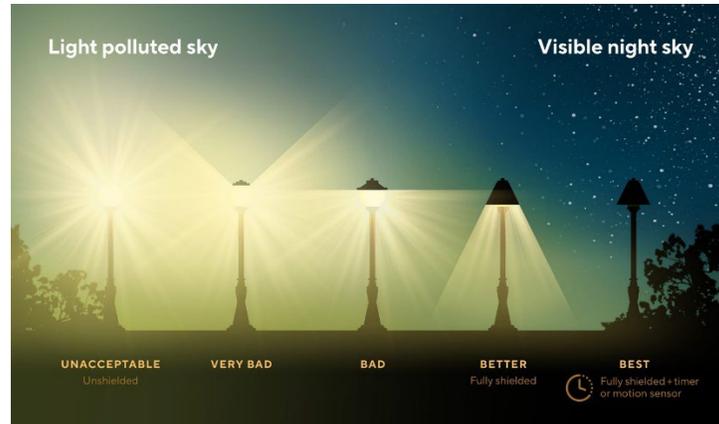
- *The application takes serious work, but if the community is behind it, it's smooth sailing. (Tubac, AZ)*
- *Lean on other Dark Sky Certified communities for their advice and experience on implementing dark sky standards. (Groveland City, FL)*
- *More work than was expected. Without support from Oregon Dark Sky, especially Michael McKeag, we would not have been able to attain the required information for our application. (Antelope, OR)*

2. Be Patient.

- *Give it time. In many ways this is a forced change in the way people have lived their lives. Our biggest issue is city folk moving rural and bringing the behavior of having outdoor lighting always on. It's a perceived security need that's been indoctrinated for generations (Crestone, CO)*
- *It takes several years to get designation. (Castle Valley, UT)*
- *Get community support and buy-in early on in the process. Plan on a long process. Be detailed and thorough in your application. (Springdale, UT)*
- *Our town was only 1/3 built out and we had no retail or commercial businesses at the time. There may be a hard push back if a town is mostly built out. It will take time to get companies to redo their lighting. Just stay after it. (Lakewood Village, TX)*

- *DO IT - but do a lot of community education about all the benefits ahead of the certification so they are excited about the certification when it arrives. (Lakewood Village, TX)*
- 3. Education is the key.**
- *Education is the key to community buy-in. (Paonia, CO)*
 - *Community support is essential. (Moab, UT)*
 - *Find well-respected, long-time residents who support the night sky and have them help convince their friends and neighbors. (Torrey, UT)*
 - *Community group involvement/spearheading is critical. (Camp Verde, AZ)*
 - *Involve Tourism Board or Chamber (Sedona, AZ)*
 - *Get the community involved early on, before you approach governmental entities. Expand the SQM monitoring program. Do programs for the kids (presentations plus art contests) so their parents will hear about it. Start a Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program. Engage with allied environmental groups but don't become an environmental crazy. Engage with social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc). Have a Newsletter. Develop an organization with paying members. Take the long view and there will be few instant results. (Blanco City, TX)*
 - *Begin by surveying citizens about their desired environment. Follow up with city council and get them on board. If necessary, rewrite the lighting ordinance. Proceed to get the message out via ALL potential means. Print, social media, websites, links, events, speaking engagements, word of mouth, contests, message boards etc. (Jonestown, TX)*
 - *In the beginning, citizens didn't know much about the Dark Sky movement. They indicated their desire for a natural, rural landscape and restricted building limits and we fit right in. Getting the word out through local marketing, events, socials, newsprint etc. took some time but we advanced through the "What are you doing" to the "Oh, I love what you're doing" stages pretty quickly. Fortunately for us, the city management, council, and a strong Dark Sky community in the Hill Country of Texas all supported our efforts. (Jonestown, TX)*
- 4. Be open-minded.**
- *Stick with it! And get as many perspectives as possible. (Sisters, OR)*
 - *Select a committee with high profile and well-liked citizens representing many community groups and be sure to include govt officials on the committee. (Wimberley Valley, TX)*
- 5. Have a well-written ordinance.**
- *Get a GOOD and CLEAR ordinance in place with excellent samples of lighting fixtures built into the code, information on HOW TO light things up that comply with the code, an enforcement element of the code and funding for assistance with replacing fixtures. (Village of Oak Creek/Big Park, AZ)*
 - *The Village of Homer Glen is unique as we incorporated in 2001 with the motto "Community and Nature in Harmony" so our priority to preserve our night sky was present from the start. I imagine it would be difficult to obtain a DarkSky certification without support from the elected officials and residents, as a strong lighting ordinance for dark sky development is important. (Village of Homer Glen, IL)*

RESOURCES FOR NEW INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY COMMUNITIES



*DarkSky International's graphic of bad - better - best examples of shielded versus unshielded light fixtures.
<https://darksky.org/resources/what-is-light-pollution/>*

IDSC materials provided by survey respondents:

- **Hill Country Alliance, TX** - [New Friends of the Night Sky – Resource Guide](#)
- **Springdale, UT** – [Springdale Dark Sky Information Pamphlet](#)

Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Programs:

- **Blanco City, TX** - [Night Friendly Business Program](#) (April 2023)
- **Borrego Springs, CA** - [Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program](#)
- **Hill Country Alliance, TX** - [Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program](#)
- **Kane County, UT** - [Kane County Friends of the Night Sky Program](#)

Dark Sky Rebate Programs:

- **Moab, UT** - [Outdoor Lighting Retrofit Assistance Program](#)
- **Truckee, CA** - [Dark Sky Rebate Program](#)

DarkSky “Approved” Programs:

- [Luminaires](#)
- [Lodging](#)
- [Outdoor Sports Lighting Program](#)

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DARK SKY COOPERATIVES

- [Attend Dark Sky Cooperatives' Quarterly CONNECTIONS meetings](#) - a free educational series that brings together a diverse audience interested in learning about topics related to the protection and management of dark night skies.
- [Sign up to receive the Dark Sky Cooperatives' Newsletter](#) – to enjoy the dark sky spotlight-of-the-month, learn of new resources, and find out about upcoming events and ways you can get involved with dark sky conservation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the following people who offered insights for this survey:

International Dark Sky Community	Year of Certification	Point of Contact
<u>Village of Homer Glen Village, IL</u>	2011	Taylor Udarbe
<u>Sedona, AZ</u>	2014	Mark Lawler and Kevin Cook
<u>Big Park Village of Oak Creek, AZ</u>	2016	David Norton
<u>Camp Verde, AZ</u>	2018	David Meyers
<u>Wimberley Valley, TX</u>	2018	Greg Webb
<u>Torrey, UT</u>	2018	Ms. Mary Bedingfieldsmith
<u>Lakewood Village, TX</u>	2019	Linda Ruth and Sheryl France
<u>Crestone, CO</u>	2021	Scott Stevens
<u>Blanco City, TX</u>	2022	Wayne Gosnell
<u>Groveland City, FL</u>	2023	Andrew Landis
<u>Springdale, UT</u>	2023	Rick Wixom and Tom Dansie
<u>Jonestown, TX</u>	2023	Mark Grossman and David Morley
<u>Castle Valley, UT</u>	2024	Jocelyn Buck
<u>Moab, UT</u>	2024	Alexi Lamm
<u>Tubac, AZ</u>	2024	Dr. Emilio Falco
<u>Paonia, CO</u>	2024	Aaron Watson
<u>Antelope, OR</u>	2024	Brandie McNamee
<u>Sisters, OR</u>	2025	Rima Givot



Paonia, Colorado beneath the Milky Way, Photo Credit: Aaron Watson, [Dark Skies Paonia](#)