

# GUEST SPOTLIGHT



## POLICY MATTERS. ADVOCACY WORKS.

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*Image: NPS/ Ryan Maurer Photo*

My dark sky journey began in 2014 in my first season working for the National Park Service. I had just moved back to Utah after interning at historic sites in Massachusetts, (I still believe I am perhaps the only Utahn to leave the state to work for the Park Service in New England) and I was a seasonal interpreter at Timpanogos Cave National Monument. It was quite a trip to work at a site I'd visited as a small child. My most distinctive memory of the cave was buying rock candy at the gift shop, but I had a feeling I'd gain a fresh appreciation for the site as a ranger.

Soon after giving my first few cave tours, something significant about Timpanogos Cave hit me. "Lights out"—the act of turning off all the lights in a cave chamber—proved to be one of the most evocative parts of every cave tour. Some visitors loved it (squealing with delight was a common reaction), some feared it, and still others said the experience of total darkness was what they remembered most from past visits to the cave. In any case, darkness was a profoundly impactful part of almost everyone's Timpanogos Cave experience.

Complete darkness is a necessary condition for cave ecology, but it is a truly unusual condition for humans, and we react to it viscerally. This realization got me thinking about the value and experience of darkness in human life. I read *The End of Night* that year, a great and accessible book on the dark by Paul Bogard. The book introduced me to the basics of light pollution and the global efforts to preserve the dark and change our human relationship to it.

By the next season, I was primed to jump at an opportunity to help organize Timpanogos Cave's first night sky programs, an idea hatched by a fellow ranger and the local astronomy club.

Our first night sky programs the summer of 2015 occurred in concert with a run of national park dark sky certifications in Utah and the emerging (2012) Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative. As we DIYed our program features and materials copying things we'd seen at star parties elsewhere (the maglight shielding demo, homemade bortle scale simulators, covering flashlights with red cellophane and eventually balloons) we had no idea that parks across Utah were also diving into dark sky programming and working on their applications to become dark sky certified.

From 2014 to 2019, eight Utah national park sites earned dark sky certifications from the IDA. (One, Natural Bridges National Monument, already had its designation, which it earned a decade earlier as the world's very first dark sky park.) I'm happy to report that in late 2020 Timpanogos Cave joined the list of dark sky certified parks as Utah's first—and only the world's second—Urban Night Sky Place.

35 miles south of Salt Lake City and right on the doorstep of the rapidly growing Wasatch Front, Timpanogos Cave is an urban-proximate park. It is not the darkest place in Utah. The Urban Night Sky Place certification recognizes places near major cities with community programs "whose planning and design actively promote an authentic nighttime experience in the midst of significant artificial light."

To me this designation signals a change from protecting some of the most remote natural landscapes in the world as dark sky havens to celebrating areas near cities that work hard to preserve natural darkness and share it with the public, empowering them to protect the night in their own backyards.

My days as a ranger hiking to work and hanging out underground all summer are behind me. Now I work in national park advocacy for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) where I connect people to the civic process of protecting parks. I am also on the board of IDA's Utah chapter focusing on legislative and outreach priorities.

I'm thrilled to continue to be involved in the dark sky movement in Utah as I've shifted into nonprofit and volunteer advocacy work, and now I'm committed to doing more to preserve dark skies. To do this, I help people build the knowledge and skills necessary to advocate for good policy and engage in the civic process effectively.

Utah truly has the darkest skies in America; the state sports more dark sky certified places than anywhere in the world. But if I've learned anything in environmental advocacy it's that every victory is temporary while every loss is permanent. We need to keep up the good work.

Policy matters. Advocacy works. We must use our voices to speak loudly together for continued dark sky protection in Utah and beyond. I encourage anyone who loves the night skies to get involved and become an advocate.

- Email me to learn how to become a dark skies advocate: [cjones@npca.org](mailto:cjones@npca.org)
- Get connected with IDA Utah: [utah.darksky.ngo/join-us](https://www.ida.org/utah-darksky-ngo/join-us)
- Learn more about NPCA or become a member: [www.npca.org](https://www.npca.org)

