

GUEST SPOTLIGHT



SUPPORTING PUBLIC LANDS ACROSS THE COLORADO PLATEAU

THE PEAKS, PLATEAUS, AND CANYONS ASSOCIATION

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If you've visited a National Park, National Monument, BLM or Forest Service visitor center or book store on public lands, chances are you've met a "Cooperating Association" – a nonprofit partner of a public land agency working in support of education, science and stewardship in their local area. In 1920, just 4 years after the establishment of the National Park Service, Yosemite led the way in establishing cooperating associations in National Parks. Many of the oldest cooperating associations are on the Colorado Plateau which hosts the greatest concentration of National Park Service units in the United States. But not all cooperating associations are affiliated with National Parks or Monuments.

Peaks, Plateaus and Canyons Association (PPCA) was born in 1993 out of the knowledge that public lands on the Colorado Plateau shared common resources (especially water, wildlife and the night sky), visitors, and interests.

We realized much could be learned and shared among the associations serving these areas. PPCA members serve the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, National Conservation Areas, tribes, counties, cities, towns and the visitors to all public lands on the Plateau.

PPCA members are selling terrific night sky products in our stores with the proceeds from the sales supporting education and science in their local areas. Sales items include: books for all ages, night sky playing cards, t-shirts that glow in the dark and other apparel, ornaments, posters, bookmarks, magnets, postcards, telescopes, star charts, and so much more! Members are hosting school programs, lecture series, star viewing activities, and night sky preservation projects.

Mesa Verde National Park submitted their IDA application in November 2020 and are awaiting the decision and hoping for designation. Other members are just beginning the process.



Links to all 14 of PPCA's member associations and the PPCA Dark Sky Parks page can be found at peaksplateausandcanyons.org

We'd like to feature a story from one of our members, the Public Lands Interpretive Association. National Park Service Ranger Mark Abetz brings us this contribution:

Along with our National Park Service partners at El Malpais National Monument, the staff at El Malpais National Conservation Area has been busy this last year taking night sky readings and collecting data to show just how dark our skies are. This is not just in preparation to apply to be certified to be one of the International Dark Sky Association International Dark Sky Places, it helps us understand more and be better stewards of the resources we protect.

The night sky itself is a resource. It is tied to us and what is around us. The night sky is a part of the culture and traditions of Native Americans who call El Malpais their homeland and have for many generations. Numerous plants and animals depend on the dark night sky for their survival. As humans, our bodies need the darkness to stay healthy. Our public lands such as El Malpais are some of the last harbingers of the dark night sky that is so vital. It is estimated that one third of humanity lives in areas where they cannot see the Milky Way because of artificial light pollution.

What can we do? During a recent renovation to our ranger station visitor center, we removed the old unshielded exterior building and parking lot lights and replaced them with more dark sky friendly shielded LED lights. Our staff has the opportunity and responsibility to inform and educate visitors to El Malpais and the local community about the night sky and the importance of protecting this endangered resource. We invite visitors to come and see our dark skies for themselves and take that magical experience home with them to share.

If we stop polluting the ocean today, it would be a wonderful thing. However, it would take time to recover. If we turn out the lights at night, it gets dark.

Mark's last line says it all! PPCA members look forward to continuing to be part of the effort to preserve our night sky resources for future benefit and enjoyment of residents and visitors, whether human, aviary, flora or fauna!



A Bureau of Land Management park ranger shows a visitor the night sky through a telescope. BLM Photo.



Park rangers collect El Malpais night sky data recorded by SQM solar powered monitoring units. BLM Photo.



Night sky readings using a handheld SQM unit at El Malpais. NPS Photo.