

Dark Sky Month

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5 tips to help you work with public officials on getting support for dark skies

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Eric Porter and Kurt Gensheimer sitting outside their glowing tent as the Milky Way and stars light up in the night sky above them at a campsite near Pole Canyon in Southern Utah.

To celebrate its new position as the world leader in dark sky preservation, Governor Spencer Cox of Utah declared April 2021 as “[Utah Dark Sky Month](#).” This declaration, coinciding with the International Dark Sky Association’s International Dark Sky Week, was shared on the governor’s official website along with his social media channels, and spurred [several stories](#) from local media outlets. The declaration helped to spread dark sky awareness to residents and bring additional legitimacy to grassroots dark sky preservation efforts.

The [Utah Office of Tourism](#), part of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, was instrumental in getting the declaration issued. Here are 5 tips to help you work with public officials on getting support for dark skies.

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1. Do your homework

Public officials are busy! Between their public duties and personal lives, they may not have much time to discuss dark skies and fully understand the issue. Before contacting your elected officials, do your homework on their priorities and responsibilities and identify what exactly you would like them to do. Will dark skies align with their policy agendas? What data and information will they need to know? What news stories, anecdotes, or displays of public support can you reference?

2. Reach out

Your public officials won’t know about your ideas unless you share them. Different officials will have different preferences for communicating with constituents. Some will gladly accept calls, emails, and texts personally while others will prefer you work through their staff. You can raise the issue in a public comment portion of a public meeting, or work with other stakeholders and partners who might have opportunities to meet with the public official. No matter how you reach out, keep your message brief, direct, and positive. In the case of Utah’s gubernatorial proclamation, the Utah Office of Tourism worked with the governor’s public relations team. We reached out to the team with a specific request to be accomplished by a certain date. The public relations team held a follow-up conversation before bringing our idea directly to the governor who ultimately approved the idea.

3. Identify the why

When you speak with public officials, use your homework to communicate why your request has value. In our case, we demonstrated that a dark sky month declaration would further our [office’s mission and priorities](#) as well as many of the governor’s priorities. We made the case that an April declaration would be appropriate to celebrate Utah’s 23 accredited International Dark Sky places during International Dark Sky Week.

4. Offer your help

Once your public officials approve of your idea, offer your assistance to execute on the idea. In Utah, we volunteered to write the first draft of the declaration and committed to creating [an astrotourism toolkit](#) that would

amplify the governor's declaration. We wanted to show our commitment to the idea and express how important the governor's involvement was to our effort.

5. Show your appreciation

Finally, listen to your mother and remember to say "Thank you!" Everyone, public officials included, like to be of service and appreciate when their efforts are acknowledged. Remember to let your public officials know that you are grateful for their help.

June 2021 is dark sky month in Colorado!

Utah isn't the only state celebrating a dark sky month this year. Colorado Governor Jared Polis recently signed a proclamation declaring *June 2021 as "Dark Sky Month."* The announcement coincides with *several new* Colorado Dark Sky Place certifications.

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Click [here](#) to explore the Utah Office of Tourism Dark Skies Edition Toolkit.

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