

# Dark Sky Cooperatives - 2023 Year in Review

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

## Promoting and protecting the night skies of the Western US

Looking back at 2023, the Dark Sky Cooperatives had several notable accomplishments aimed at promoting and protecting the exceptional night skies of the Western U.S. Two educational programs, the [CPDSC Quarterly CONNECTIONS](#) and the [Utah Dark Sky Passport](#) were launched, each of which provides a unique resource for community leaders, planners, and advocates and for youth and their families respectively, to inspire interest and inform about the value of the night sky. Also in 2023, implementation of the [\\$1.9M EDA grant-funded municipal streetlighting retrofit project](#) began in Boulder City, NV, after a substantial effort by the BRDSC and its partners, to help secure those funds. These are examples of the ways the Dark Sky Cooperatives can have lasting, positive impacts on individuals, our communities, and the region as a whole. The Dark Sky Cooperatives are dedicated to increasing awareness of the values of the night sky, ensuring a space for meaningful conversation, learning and exploration, and enhancing personal experiences with our starry nights. Thank you to all the dark sky advocates from across the region for your hard work and determination.

The Dark Sky Cooperatives are looking for ways to improve and expand our reach. Many different backgrounds, expertise, and interests bring this community together. There are also many questions and work that can be done to protect the night sky, while simultaneously adding a new dimension to rural economies through astrotourism. We welcome anyone who wants to collaborate in the celebration of the cosmos and supports the actions that will prevent a light-polluted future. We invite you to spread the word about what night skies mean to you and about this work.



Delicate Arch, Arches National Park; Photo Credit: Ken Cheung

Below are some of the highlights from our work in 2023.

### CPDSC [Quarterly CONNECTIONS Webinar Series](#)

New in 2023, the CPDSC developed an interactive webinar series for stakeholders focused on ways to minimize light pollution and preserve dark skies. Across the four [Quarterly CONNECTIONS](#) meetings held in 2023, we had 125 unique participants, representing 13 states, and 4 countries. Each of the following webinars was recorded and shared on the CPDSC YouTube channel to support a growing "self-learning" library. Registration for the first [Quarterly CONNECTIONS](#) meeting in 2024 is now open on the [Quarterly CONNECTIONS](#) website.

- Apr - [Protecting the Night Sky](#)
- Jun - [Economic Development Opportunities](#)
- Sep - [Education and Outreach/Advocacy](#)
- Dec - [The Opportunity: Astrotourism](#)

### Utah Dark Sky Passport Program

In the summer of 2023, the [Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism \(IORT\)](#) at Utah State University developed and rolled out the [Utah Dark Sky Passport](#), a new educational tool to connect youth and their families to the cosmos. The program includes a [pocket-sized passport](#) and the Dark Sky Passport companion website full of fun activities and a map showing all of Utah's dark sky-certified places. Nearly 30,000 Dark Sky Passports were distributed to state and national park units, County Destination Management Offices, private individuals, an outdoor education center, and a community observatory. The Dark Sky Passport was designed so it could accompany any existing night sky education program. We plan to develop the program further in 2024.

### Dark Sky Cooperatives Newsletter

A total of 10 Dark Sky Cooperative Newsletters were published in 2023. The newsletter had an annual average of 718 subscribers this past year. Links to the 2023

newsletters are below with the topic for each monthly spotlight highlighted.

- Feb - Spotlight: Celebrating the Starry Skies of Oregon
- Mar - Spotlight: Dark Sky Cooperative Quarterly CONNECTIONS Announcement
- Apr - Spotlight: Lights Out! Community Science for Bird Conservation
- May - Spotlight: Sacred Skies
- Jun - Spotlight: Connecting Night Skies to Healthy Public Lands
- Jul/Aug - Spotlight: Utah's Dark Sky Passport
- Sep - Spotlight: A Dark Sky Course for Electrical Contractors
- Oct - Spotlight: Dark Sky Parks Down Under
- Nov - Spotlight: Got Stars, Central Oregon?
- Dec - Spotlight: The Winter Solstice as a Time for Reflection (Festival of Lights)

### Coordinated Letter Writing Campaign

For the June issue of the Dark Sky Cooperatives Newsletter, we did something a little different to raise awareness about the BLM's newly Proposed Public Lands Rule, posted in the [Federal Register](#) (dated 3 April 2023). The spotlight [Connecting Night Skies to Healthy Public Lands](#) was written in support of the idea that dark skies should be considered a critical natural resource deserving the same kind of protections that support clean air, clear water, and clean land.

### CPDSC News Coverage

- Reagan, D. (2023, Nov 8). [Announcing the 2023 DarkSky award winners](#), See: Dr. John Barentine, receiving the Galileo Award. *DarkSky.org News*
- Harrison, A. (2023, July 20). [Springdale, Utah becomes Utah's twentieth International Dark Sky Place](#). *DarkSky.org News*
- Houk, R. (2023, May 3). [Earth notes: Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative](#). *KNAU News Talk - Arizona Public Radio*
- Boyce, R. (2023, April 7). [Defending the dark: Utah's dark sky advocates protect Utah's shining natural resource](#). *KSL.com*

### BRDSC News Coverage

Implementation of the [\\$1.9M EDA-funded project](#) begins in Boulder City, NV to retrofit municipal streetlights to become more night-sky friendly.

- National Park Service (Summer, 2023). [When Communities Lead the Way](#), See: "Ashley Pipkin's Story: Bringing Back the Stars." Originally published

in the "Features" section of *Park Science magazine*, Volume 37, Number 1, Summer 2023

- Adams, K. (2023, July 27). [Boulder City working to curb light pollution](#). *Boulder City Review*
- Adams, K. (2023, July 24). [Looking to the stars: Nevada communities working to curb light pollution](#). *Las Vegas Review-Journal*



Joshua Tree National Park; Photo Credit: Jayma Leavengood

### A Special Thanks to Ashley Pipkin!

We want to recognize the service and exceptional leadership of Ashley Pipkin as the Coordinator for the [Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperative \(BRDSC\)](#) for the last 4 years, and her 7 years as a [National Park Service's Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division \(NPS-NSNSD\) Specialist for the Pacific West Region](#). With her deep understanding of night sky science and a grassroots approach, Ashley helped build the BRDSC from its infancy to a well-respected group of dark sky advocates 140+ members strong. It is with great respect and appreciation that we recognize Ashley's commitment to the protection of nocturnal environments from the effects of increasing light pollution. Ashley was an amazing resource for the BRDSC, by addressing technical questions from the group, relaying updates about night skies data, and educating attendees at star gazing events. For the bi-monthly BRDSC Cooperative meetings, Ashley drew together representatives from state and federal agencies, tribal nations, business owners, community leaders, non-profit organizations, educators, and private individuals. These meetings offer a place for dark sky advocates to share updates, to learn from each other's experiences, and of upcoming events. In July 2022, Ashley transitioned to a new position within the NPS-NSNSD but continued to lead the BRDSC through the end of 2023. Prior to her transition, Ashley worked closely with Nevada's Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR) and helped secure a [\\$1.9 million EDA-funded grant](#) awarded for a streetlight retrofit project converting to night-friendly lights in Boulder City, Nevada.

On behalf of the CPDSC and the BRDSC, thank you, Ashley!

