

Got Stars, Central Oregon?

11/17/2023

Bill Kowalik, Chair of DarkSky Oregon, Bend, Oregon

A consortium of partners dedicated to a starry future over Oregon's central region

A new community-wide initiative, *Got Stars, Central Oregon?* aims to bring back and sustain the starry nights over Oregon's high desert three-county region of Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson as a way to support local tourism and improve the quality of life for residents. In 2023, the Central Oregon tourism non-profit [Visit Central Oregon \(VCO\)](#) launched a competitive "Future Fund" grant process with \$840,000 of available funds, generated from the state's Transient Room Tax (TRT) or lodging tax, collected by both Deschutes County and Travel Oregon. Successful grant applications were selected based on their ability to enhance accessibility, support cultural tourism, and create sustainability in this three-county region.



Milky Way splendor over Steelhead Falls, upper Deschutes River, Oregon
Photo Credit: Barbara Rummer

[DarkSky Oregon](#) coordinated a joint grant application with nine partner organizations to support dark skies in Central Oregon. *Got Stars, Central Oregon?* was awarded a \$95,000 grant. We are collaborating on a community-wide initiative to showcase the importance and solutions related to dark skies and astrotourism through outreach, education, and implementation of projects.

Our project envisions the return of starry night skies to Central Oregon by voluntary choices of good outdoor lighting by residents, businesses, and visitors. We expect

community-wide support for sustaining Central Oregon's dark skies for the health and well-being of people and the wild ecosystem into the future, despite population growth. We envision Central Oregon's economy to be enhanced by sustaining our regional astrotourism resources.



Got Stars, Central Oregon? supports these visions through projects led by each partner organization funded under this single grant. The partners include seven non-profit organizations, an Oregon State Park, and an Oregon University group. Projects include outreach on responsible outdoor lighting by online, print, and TV, improving visitor experiences at dark sky places, gardens for nighttime pollinators, amber porch light bulb giveaways, a local nighttime museum exhibit, showcases of good lighting, and astronomy outreach.



Scott Lake, Central Oregon
Photo Credit: Barbara Rummer

Participating organizations include:

- [The High Desert Museum](#) – a non-profit, using seed money to update a forest exhibit to incorporate “Why the Forest Needs the Dark”
- [Prineville Reservoir State Park](#) – using funds to replace outdoor lighting and install signage
- [Sunriver Nature Center and Observatory](#) – a non-profit, replacing outdoor perimeter lighting to be more dark sky-friendly
- [Worthy Environmental](#) – a non-profit, associated with Worthy Brewing, using funds to educate visitors about their research grade “Hopobservatory” facility
- [Pollinator Pathways Bend](#) – a non-profit, installing pollinator gardens at Sunriver Nature Center
- [Pine Mountain Observatory – University of Oregon](#) – replacing online night cameras of the facility
- [Cascade Astronomy and Rocketry Academy](#) – a non-profit upgrading astronomy gear “to bring the sights and science of the cosmos to schools and the wider community”
- [DarkSky Oregon](#) – a non-profit and independent chapter of DarkSky International, funding a variety of outreach and dark sky park certification expenses. More detail below
- [Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District](#) – a non-profit, wrote the grant and is now handling the financial aspects of the grant

With [DarkSky Oregon](#), our goal is to increase community-wide outreach initiatives. We will provide information for news media, social media, websites, and other partner networks between the Summer of 2023 and Spring of 2024. We intend our outreach to include short, informative animation commercials for TV and online release – for example, on aspects of quality lighting at night, nighttime pollinators, circadian rhythm, etc. We have draft scripts for several animations and are looking for one or more artists to participate. Artists/animators need not be from Central Oregon. Get in touch to discuss/participate! Our funding also supports the purchase of Sky Quality Meters for dark sky place certification in Central Oregon. To date, we have installed three SQMs to cover the large area of the Newberry National Volcanic Monument to support their management’s support for Dark Sky Park certification. Another SQM has been installed in the City of Antelope to support dark sky community certification. Previously, SQMs have been installed in and around the City of Sisters to support their dark sky community effort.

The 2023-2024 funds need to be spent within one year. Visit Central Oregon expects to have about \$400k available in the 2024-2025 Future Fund project. We hope to be successful again by demonstrating that funds were well-spent in the current year and by building on those projects. The *Got Stars, Central Oregon?* project is part of a more significant Oregon-wide effort to support astrotourism that is being facilitated by Travel Oregon and supported by DarkSky Oregon. There is potential for funding support within other regions of Oregon through different regions of Travel Oregon. To help with the branding of our project, we created the poster attached below. The poster is available to our partner organizations for display at *Got Stars, Central Oregon?* events.



Learn More

- [DarkSky Oregon](#)
- [Got Stars, Central Oregon?](#)
- [Visit Central Oregon \(VCO\) - Future Fund](#)