

Under One Sky: Leading with Wonder

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Western Slope Dark Sky Coalition

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In this month's *Member Spotlight*, we're honored to highlight the new Executive Director of the **Western Slope DarkSky Coalition, Olivia Bobbitt**—a leader whose path to dark sky conservation is rooted in curiosity, community, and a lifelong relationship with the night sky. From childhood awe beneath Colorado stars to hands-on leadership in rural dark-sky communities, Olivia's story reflects what this movement is really about: protecting something ancient, shared, and deeply human.

Path & Role

What drew you to the Western Slope DarkSky Coalition and this role as Executive Director?

I first connected with the Western Slope dark-sky movement in June 2025 when I attended a West End Dark Sky Alliance (WEDSA) meeting to learn what it truly means to become an International Dark Sky Community—and how I could support that work. WEDSA represents the joint International Dark Sky Community of Naturita and Nucla, and at that meeting, I was invited to step in as Secretary. From there, I

became deeply involved—attending meetings, supporting outreach, and helping with local events like Naturita Days and Nucla Water Days. In November 2025, WEDSA's President, Deb Stueber, reached out to share that the Western Slope DarkSky Coalition would soon be seeking both a President and an Executive Director. Based on my contributions, she encouraged me to consider stepping into leadership.

I had never served as an Executive Director before, but I've always seen myself as a leader—and I've always been drawn to the stars. Saying yes felt natural. It was a chance to serve my community, support a mission I care deeply about, and help protect the night sky that makes the West End so special.



Can you tell us a bit about your background and how it prepared you for this work?

As a young biracial, queer leader who chose to build a life in a predominantly white rural mountain town, my leadership is shaped by lived diversity, resilience, and a deep commitment to belonging. My love for the night sky began when I was ten years old on an outdoor education trip to the Colorado mountains. One night, during a group walk, I looked up and saw a sky so full of stars it felt unreal. That moment stayed with me. Growing up later in Denver and Chicago, I rarely experienced skies like that again—until I moved to Naturita. Living in an International Dark Sky Community has reawakened that early sense of awe. Professionally, I worked in Chicago as a Family Childcare Specialist with the Carole Robertson Center for Learning. That role taught me how to translate complex information into accessible guidance, communicate with empathy, and balance commitment with sustainability—skills that are essential in nonprofit leadership.

Protecting the night sky is deeply personal to me. My lived experience, my connection to the universe, and my ability to build relationships prepared me for this role in ways no title ever could.

What has been the most exciting part of your first months as Executive Director?

Realizing that I'm leading an organization dedicated to preserving the night sky has been incredibly energizing. Many people don't realize how much light pollution affects not just stargazing, but human health, wildlife, and our sense of place. I love using this platform to share information, spark curiosity, and especially engage younger generations. Helping people rediscover the night sky—and understand why it matters—has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Mission & Work of the Coalition

How would you describe WSDSC's mission to someone new to dark sky conservation?

The Western Slope DarkSky Coalition is a regional nonprofit that serves as a backbone organization for local dark-sky groups across San Miguel, Montrose, Ouray, and Dolores counties. Rural communities often face limited funding, staffing, and access to technical support. Our mission is to make dark-sky protection achievable by providing guidance, resources, and hands-on support—helping communities protect their natural night skies, reduce light pollution, and celebrate the stars that define this region.



What strategies are you focusing on to protect night skies across the Western Slope?

Education and public awareness are our primary strategies. When people understand why natural darkness matters—and how better lighting improves sleep, safety, energy use, and wildlife—they feel empowered to act. We're also strengthening regional collaboration. Communities face similar challenges, and when they share resources and successes, everyone benefits. Recently, we received a \$5,000 grant that will support public star-watch events using telescopes and binoculars—bringing the sky directly to the people.

Are there projects you're especially excited about?

Yes—one major initiative is working toward designating **San Miguel County as an International Dark Sky Reserve**. If successful, it would be the first county in the world to receive that designation. Our Reserve Team is currently drafting the application and hopes to submit it in the coming months.

Community Impact & Leadership

Can you share a story that embodies the spirit of dark-sky stewardship?

Our Coalition President, Deb Stueber, exemplifies this spirit. Inspired by her father—an Earth science and astronomy educator—Deb has spent decades advocating for natural darkness. Her leadership helped Naturita and Nucla become a joint International Dark Sky Community in 2021.

Following that success, Deb co-founded the Western Slope DarkSky Coalition to help other towns follow the same path. Her perseverance, advocacy, and care for community are a reminder that this work is built on commitment and love for place.



Looking Ahead

How do you see the Coalition evolving under your leadership?

Over the next two years, I envision WSDSC becoming a trusted, visible presence in the West End. We've secured six months of funding for an office in Naturita, which I hope will become a welcoming hub for learning, connection, and pride in living under dark skies.

I also plan to expand programming—both in-person and online—through star-watch events, storytelling, and educational offerings that support wellbeing for families, wildlife, and the land itself.

What's one misconception you'd like to dispel?

That dark-sky work is political. It isn't. Protecting the night sky is about being human. Everyone relies on healthy cycles of day and night, and everyone benefits when we reduce unnecessary light.

A Few Personal Notes

- **Favorite night-sky feature:** Planets and Orion's Belt
- **Favorite stargazing spot:** My own backyard
- **Why this work matters:** Because natural darkness connects us—to ourselves, to each other, and to the universe we share

Closing Thought

The night sky has guided humans for millennia. Through leaders like this, and through communities willing to look up together, that legacy continues—quietly, beautifully, and with purpose.