

Big Park, Arizona, Named International Dark Sky Community

TUCSON, Ariz. (22 February 2016) – In recognition of local efforts to promote and protect its naturally dark nighttime environment, the International Dark-Sky Association has named Big Park, Arizona, an International Dark Sky Community. The village, also informally known as the “Village of Oak Creek,” joins the nearby Arizona cities of Flagstaff and Sedona in receiving the accolade, resulting in the densest grouping of IDA Dark Sky Communities in the world. In recognition of both its formal and informal names, the new designation is known as “Big Park/Village of Oak Creek International Dark Sky Community.”

“The efforts of Big Park in obtaining IDA recognition not only provide better lighting for the area residents, but also help to protect dark skies over sensitive sites in northern Arizona,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend. “This demonstrates the steady march of the dark-skies movement across the American southwest.”

The community of Big Park is an unincorporated area in far northeastern Yavapai County, Arizona. Home to slightly over 6,000 people, the village is located 7 miles (11 km) south of Sedona, which was designated an IDA International Dark Sky Community in 2014. Tourism and service to a population of retirees and vacation-home owners are the main basis for the village economy. Many residents prefer the rustic, rural setting of Big Park to the increasingly urbanized characteristics of Sedona.

The effort to designate the village began as the result of Sedona’s achievement, and has brought greater awareness of dark skies to the area west and south of the area. In order to make the unincorporated village eligible for Dark Sky Community status, the applicants successfully lobbied for changes and improvements to the Yavapai County outdoor lighting ordinance. The result is a county-wide lighting code that brings an equivalent degree of dark-skies protection as is found in any Dark Sky Community. This outcome is unique among Dark Sky Communities in the United States.

Joanne Kendrick, chair of the Big Park/Village of Oak Creek Dark-Sky Committee, explained the motivation behind the effort to seek IDA accreditation for the village. “The dark skies above Big Park/Village of Oak Creek are so beautiful they take one’s breath away. Our community values this natural resource and is dedicated to preserving the dark skies for us and for future generations.”

Kendrick specifically cited the co-operation of the Big Park Regional Coordinating Council and the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors in enabling the successful application. “Our heartfelt thanks go to all who made this possible, including the many residents, organizations and businesses who wrote to the IDA in support of dark-sky protection.”

Furthermore, building off a successful public outreach program developed for Sedona, the applicants did much to educate village residents and property owners on the importance of maintaining the area’s dark nighttime environment. It was an easy sell for a community that already held its dark night skies in high esteem.

“We have many astronomers living here so we have a deep appreciation for the value of our night skies,” said Dave Norton, vice president of the Big Park Regional Coordinating Council. “We are all very lucky to live in such a wonderful place where we can enjoy beautiful red rocks by day and gorgeous skies above us at night displaying the vast universe that we live in.”

Images



The Milky Way rises over Big Park / Village of Oak Creek, Arizona. (Credit: Robert Mueller)
<http://bit.ly/20Pb4N9>

About the IDA Dark Sky Places Program

IDA established the International Dark Sky Places conservation program in 2001 to recognize excellent stewardship of the night sky. Designations are based on stringent outdoor lighting standards and innovative community outreach. Since the program began, 14 Communities, 31 Parks, 10 Reserves, two Sanctuaries and three Dark Sky Friendly Developments of Distinction have received International Dark Sky designations. For more information about the International Dark Sky Places Program, visit <http://darksky.org/idsp>.

About IDA

The International Dark Sky Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, advocates for the protection of the nighttime environment and dark night skies by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and promoting environmentally responsible outdoor lighting. More information about IDA and its mission may be found at <http://www.darksky.org>.

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