What is an International Dark Sky Reserve?

An International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR) is a public or private land of substantial size (minimum 173,000 acres) possessing an exceptional quality of starry nights and nocturnal environment, and that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment.

International Dark Sky Reserves are one of the certifications offered through the International Dark Sky Places Program administered by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). Globally, there are 16 International Dark Sky Reserves, only one of which is in the United States.

An IDSR is formed through a partnership of public and private landowners and/or managers that recognize the value of the natural nighttime environment through formal agreements, long term planning, and in some cases, establishing common lighting standards. The reserve must meet certain standards and best practices as outlined by the IDA.

What are the benefits of creating an International Dark Sky Reserve?

80% of North Americans can no longer see the Milky Way from where they live so the foremost benefit of creating an IDSR is the preservation of night skies. Utah is home to some of the darkest skies in the nation and is a national leader in night sky protection and preservation with 14 certified International Dark Sky Places — 10 of which are in Southeastern Utah.

Night sky preservation is beneficial for wildlife and can provide significant health benefits for humans. Moreover, the promotion of astro-tourism and the associated lodging and tax collections, along with increased property values can make a significant economic impact. Night-sky-tourism, which necessitates one or more overnight stays, can increase average travel spendings from $40.63 for day trips to over $290 for overnight stays.

Who is behind the Southeastern Utah Night Sky Reserve effort?

The Southeastern Utah Night Sky Reserve celebrates Southern Utah’s unique rural character and landscapes by preserving the region’s heritage of starry night skies for present and future generations. The effort is a grassroots initiative and is supported by a diverse group of stakeholders representing local, state, tribal, and federal entities as well as residents.

What are the boundaries for the Southeastern Utah Night Sky Reserve?

Currently, the proposed boundaries for the Southeastern Utah Night Sky Reserve encompass over 20 thousand square miles across parts of six counties in Southeastern Utah. The proposed reserve could include 16 towns and cities, 9 national parks and monuments, 1 national recreation area, 7 state parks, and a large portion the of the Navajo Nation.

The final boundaries of the reserve will only be determined after a robust public participation process with close collaboration between all relevant stakeholders including public and private land owners. Boundaries can be adjusted for expansion in the future.

The proposed night sky reserve will be a regional asset that distributes visitation geographically as well as seasonally throughout the area — a benefit to areas hoping to reduce the impact of heavy visitation as well as to areas that wish to attract more visitors throughout the year. A reserve will also ensure that the night skies will be protected for future generations of residents and visitors to enjoy.

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What is the core of the reserve?
The core of a reserve must be a public or private land protected for scientific, natural, educational, cultural, heritage and/or public enjoyment. It must provide an opportunity for regular public nighttime access without a supervisor. The core has more stringent night sky protection requirements than the buffer.

What is the buffer of the reserve?
The buffer of the reserve is the surrounding area of the proposed core that supports night sky values in the core and receives similar benefits. Communities and parks within the buffer zone are encouraged to adopt lighting best practices but are not required to follow the core’s requirements.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

How will my community, business, or home be affected?
A dark sky reserve does not mean there is no lighting; rather existing and necessary lighting follows best practices. Those practices include placing outdoor lighting on timers or motion sensors, shielding light fixtures so they don’t shine skyward, and using light bulbs that are yellow and amber colored rather than white or blue.

Participation in the reserve efforts inside the buffer area is optional but highly encouraged. Local governments may adopt a lighting ordinance to better protect night skies. However, the reserve cannot be created unless 80% of the population and 80% of the land area inside the reserve boundaries adopt lighting best practices.

Does my community have to create a lighting ordinance?
Official lighting ordinances for communities in the buffer area are not required but are highly encouraged. Some communities have created a formal agreement between elected officials and residents to work together to preserve night skies. For an example of a city lighting ordinance, please refer to http://bit.ly/30hE0Jv.

What if there are residents in my town that do not want to participate and won’t change their outdoor lights?
Participation in the night sky reserve is completely voluntary. If a local government adopts an official lighting ordinance, residents are subject to compliance and enforcement of the local government.

Does it cost anything for communities to be involved?
There are no registration or membership fees associated with a night sky reserve. There could be costs associated with voluntarily retrofitting existing outdoor lighting to be night sky friendly or installing new outdoor lights. However, using IDA recommended lighting fixtures will lower overall energy consumption and spending over time.

Will my community be recognized for participating?
Yes, each community within the core or the buffer zone will be able to display the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) logo on official publications and promotions to show the community’s effort for night sky preservation.

IDA will promote and highlight new and ongoing reserve efforts and each reserve will receive recognition on the IDA website. Communities can also use their participation in an IDSR as a marketing strategy for astro-tourism, educational efforts, grants, etc.

What are the responsibilities for the Night Sky Reserve and its communities?
The IDSR will be required to submit an annual report to the International Dark Sky Places Program Manager to demonstrate ongoing compliance with the minimum requirements. If the requirements cannot be met, the certification will be revoked until the reserve meets minimum requirements once again.

How can I learn more or become involved?
Individuals are encouraged to protect night skies by changing outdoor lighting to be night-sky-friendly, advocate for the protection of night skies, educate others about the impacts of artificial light at night, and become good stewards.

LEARN MORE

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SOUTHEASTERN UTAH NIGHT SKY RESERVE
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SOUTHEASTERN UTAH NIGHT SKY RESERVE PROPOSED REGION

Certified Dark Sky Place
Applicant Dark Sky Place

National Park
National Monument
National Recreation Area
National Forest
Tribal Land