

DarkSky International celebrates the certification of the 250th International Dark Sky Place

TUCSON, AZ, UNITED STATES, November 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [DarkSky International](#) is proud to announce the certification of its 250th International Dark Sky Place with the recent designation of Lapalala Wilderness Nature Reserve in South Africa. While Lapalala marks this incredible milestone, the celebration is shared by all 250 locations worldwide that have joined DarkSky's most recognized and beloved program. Together, these places form a growing global network where pristine dark skies can be experienced and are actively protected.

As dark skies continue to erode due to the rapid growth of light pollution, increasing globally by nearly 10% each year, these protected areas serve as vital sanctuaries for wildlife that depend on natural darkness and for people seeking connection with the cosmos.

A program that puts dark skies on the map



Capture the Dark winning photograph by Tom Rae / Mount Cook National Park, Canterbury, New Zealand



Photo by Skyglow Project / Flagstaff, Arizona, first International Dark Sky Place

The [International Dark Sky Places](#) (IDSP) program began in 2001 when Flagstaff, Arizona was recognized as the world's first Dark Sky Community. In 2007, the designation of Natural Bridges National Monument in Utah as the first Dark Sky Park and Mont-Mégantic in Canada as the first Dark Sky Reserve established the program as the world's first international, third-party

certification of its kind. Today, the program includes locations across six continents, collectively protecting over 196,000 square kilometers of land under pristine night skies.

By protecting dark sky zones, the program has sparked incredible interest and inspired people to value the nighttime environment. These efforts have elevated darkness as both a vital environmental resource and a cultural treasure, driving protection efforts and fueling the worldwide growth of astrotourism.



Photo by Gareth Thomas / Lapalala Wilderness Nature Reserve, South Africa

The proven value of conserving darkness

While having dark skies is the starting point for becoming a Dark Sky Place, the program goes far beyond simply identifying locations. Through a comprehensive application and review process, each site must actively work toward protecting the nighttime environment by ensuring outdoor lighting meets rigorous standards based on DarkSky's Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting at Night.

Achieving this level of protection is no small task and represents a profound commitment to conservation. Grand Canyon National Park, for example, undertook one of the most ambitious lighting inventories in the program's history, assessing more than 5,000 fixtures and bringing the vast majority into compliance. The result is a protected nocturnal ecosystem for wildlife and an improved night-sky experience for visitors.

Across the world, similar transformations are taking shape. Kozushima Village in Japan retrofitted every public light with DarkSky Approved fixtures, restoring critical habitat for endangered sea turtles, leading to nesting for the first time in nearly a decade. In South Korea, Yeongyang Firefly Eco Park sought certification to protect threatened firefly populations, while NamibRand Nature Reserve in Namibia prioritizes dark sky protection to safeguard critically endangered species.

Beyond protecting habitat, many Dark Sky Places—such as Mesa Verde National Park, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, and the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians Reservation in the American Southwest—honor the night sky as a vital part of Indigenous knowledge and cultural identity, a living heritage that needs protection.

Each certified place shares its impact and success through education initiatives, a cornerstone of

the program. From ranger-led campfire talks to community star parties and guided night safaris, Dark Sky Places offer memorable experiences that deepen appreciation for the night sky and inspire the next generation of stewards.

Building a future where dark skies are accessible to all

While it took 17 years to reach the milestone of 100 Dark Sky Places, growing awareness and enthusiasm have accelerated the program's growth, with 150 more added in just the past seven years. The program's reach continues to expand with a record number of communities seeking to begin the application process each year.

Not only are applications increasing, but the program itself continues to evolve with new and broader ambitions. In New Zealand, for example, advocates are exploring a path to make the entire nation DarkSky certified—an unprecedented effort in global conservation.

"The stars are the limit for this program," says Ruskin Hartley, DarkSky's Executive Director and CEO. "With continued support from our global community, we're confident we'll reach record numbers of certifications in the years ahead. Dark skies cannot be overlooked in the environmental movement—or in any effort to create a better world for future generations. There is a unique unity that comes from living under one dark sky."

Support the growth of the program

Dark Sky invites everyone to learn more about the International Dark Sky Places program by visiting our website and exploring the interactive map of certified locations worldwide. Discover where you can experience the wonder of a star-filled night and start planning your next dark-sky adventure.

You can support this work by staying connected—sign up for our monthly newsletter, subscribe to our award-winning Nightscape magazine, or join our global advocate network at darksky.org.

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