

PROTECTING THE NIGHT

By Diana Umpierre and Greg Golgowski

Geographers Catherine Rich and Travis Longcore once asked,

“What if we woke up one morning only to realize that all of the conservation planning ... only told half the story – the daytime story?”

Good question. Is our diurnal basis affecting our ability to properly plan the night in our communities?

Light pollution is steadily growing and is not just a problem for sea turtles. Light pollution is the result of ineffective outdoor lighting. [NASA images](#) depict Florida among the most light-polluted regions in America and National Park Service [night sky quality](#) images show that urban skyglow can impact many miles away.

Light pollution is an interdisciplinary problem that affects many aspects of our communities, such as biodiversity, energy, property rights and human safety. Many species, including insects, birds, plants, fish and

humans, can be adversely affected by artificial light. Evidence is growing that “white” light, rich in blue/green, can disrupt the circadian rhythms of many organisms and worsen skyglow. Light glare, trespass and skyglow are signs of wasted electricity. Poorly-aimed bright lighting is a nuisance that leads to legal disputes. Disability glare affects driver and pedestrian safety. Light pollution deprives us of activities associated with the night sky. It robs children of inspiration and contributes to their nature deficit.

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In Florida, inland light pollution is often not adequately addressed in urban planning.



It is seldom mentioned in comprehensive or sustainability plans. Although there are lighting ordinances, they allow for exceptions or brightness levels that provide no significant mitigation. Federal policies like NEPA provide little protection. Initiatives, such as Complete Streets, could provide relief, but many of these projects are missing the opportunity and instead are adding bright or unshielded decorative fixtures that worsen conditions. Current lighting practices are largely the result of misconceptions about light and safety. Fortunately, there are solutions that can mitigate, or even prevent, light pollution, protect people and wildlife, without compromising the aspiration of communities to have safe multimodal streets and revitalized places that bring prosperity.

Harmony, in Osceola County, is an example of a private initiative to control light pollution. Here the developer installed public lighting with full-cutoffs. All but one of its parks are unlit, except for restrooms and pavilions. Homes include recessed porch lighting, photosensitive shielded fixtures and no yard lights. Commercial and sports field lighting is similarly shielded. Residential covenants require dark-sky friendly lighting. To promote retention of these controls, Harmony holds annual Dark Sky Festivals that showcase the pride in its lighting program and call attention to light pollution issues.

In St Johns County, citizens in advisory boards are becoming advocates for change. According to Kim Del Rance, a county planner, after a recent lighting workshop, attendees "became passionate speakers about light pollution." They desire to extend these workshops to the public and elected officials. "All four boards have expressed interest in continuing to revise both the code for their districts as well as the rest of the county." After learning the effects of blue light, they developed a mantra: "good lighting is not just good for turtles, but good for people too."

The [International Dark-Sky Association](http://www.darksky.org) offers a designation incentive program that rewards communities and protected areas that proactively address light pollution. Since its inception, more than 40 places have earned a designation, including Harmony, the first Dark Sky Development of Distinction. Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve are currently taking steps to earn one too.

Let us plan for the night responsibly. To learn more, visit www.darksky.org and check out NPS night sky data at www.nature.nps.gov/night.

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