

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

International Dark Sky Park Report, Submitted September 2017

General and Outreach Statistics:

- Contact name: Nick Myers, nickolos_myers@nps.gov or 970-249-1914 Ext: 441
- Total site visits: Nearly 238,018 in 2016. This is a 35% increase in overall visitation since 2013. Many NPS sites are experiencing rapid growth in visitation and 2017 is expected to show another significant rise in visitation at Black Canyon.
- Black Canyon presented a total of 50 night sky programs with attendance at those programs reaching 3,049 visitors. The park also offered solar viewing programs on 54 days that reached 6,015 visitors. Programs were presented by astronomy ranger interpreters, and astronomy VIPs (volunteer in parks).
- The Black Canyon Astronomical Society (BCAS) contributed 482 hours to astronomy and solar programs in the park. They did outreach in the park on 25 occasions reaching 2,092 visitors. This group of dedicated volunteers make the Astronomy program possible at Black Canyon and were awarded the NPS Intermountain Region 'Outstanding Volunteer Group' of the year in 2017 – a very prestigious and well-earned honor.
- The four park astronomy volunteers tallied 367 hours in support of astronomy evening programs and solar viewing. The park had three interpretive staff dedicated in part to astronomy. They presented 50 evening illustrated astronomy programs, 10 solar viewing days, three full moon guided walks, one winter full moon guided snowshoe walk, and four illustrated programs at BCAS public meetings.
- The park conducted the 8th annual astronomy festival on June 21-24, 2017, hosting numerous guest speakers. Bettymaya Foott of the Colorado Plateau Night Sky Cooperative, Eclipse enthusiast Chap Percival, Bat-man Tom Haraden and Harun Mehmedinovic of the SKYGLOW project. Along with these amazing special guests, astronomy rangers, BCAS and astronomy volunteers did solar observation, astro-kids activities, constellation tours and evening programs. Park biologists also presented a program on bat research in the park. All told the event reached 1,157 visitors in 4 days of programming and exceptional clear skies most nights. The 9th annual festival is planned for June 13-16.

Lighting:

- No light fixtures were added or removed from the park inventory in 2017, although the park did change the type of bulbs used in a few locations.
From the lighting inventory:
 - Light ID numbers 28 and 29 were changed to 15 watt Red LED bulbs.

The park is in the process of adding more red lights to the North Rim Ranger Station and North Rim Housing.

- While the City of Montrose, Colorado has shown great interest in supporting dark sky preservation through media and official proclamations, the park is unaware of any major shift in city lighting policy or ordinances.

Sky Quality:

- Sky quality data was collected 19 times in 2017 at various locations along the South Rim of the canyon. Sky Quality Meter (SQM) readings reached 21.6 or above on nine occasions. 17 of the 19 readings were above 21.0 and the maximum reading was 21.89 demonstrating that the excellent sky quality found here continues. SQM data is planned to be collected on the North Rim of the canyon in October and November of 2017.

Conservation/Research:

- Currently there is no research being conducted in the park that specifically relates to night skies.

Funding:

- The park continues to fund seasonal positions that have an astronomy focus. We recruit rangers that have an excellent science background and skills to interpret that science to visitors.
- The park funds a housing stipend for four astronomy volunteers to live in park housing during their time volunteering.
- Funding for travel expenses and appearance fees for special guest speakers for the Astronomy Festival in 2015, 2016 and 2017 was obtained through Aid to Parks requests through our partner, Western National Parks Association (WNPA). The park will also use this funding source in 2018.

Planned Programs:

2018 promises to be another exciting year of astronomy at Black Canyon. In addition to our weekly astronomy program offerings on Wednesday and Friday nights from May – September, the park will offer various winter night sky viewing events. The highlight of the year is the 9th annual astronomy festival on June 13-16, 2018 with special guest speakers and activities. All with the support and help from BCAS, TAAS, WNPA, park astronomy volunteers and seasonal and permanent astronomy rangers.

Community and Media Relations:

- Numerous articles relating to Black Canyon dark skies were published in the local newspaper, the Montrose Daily Press and the regional Montrose Visitor Guide, published by the city office of business and tourism.
- Park astronomy continues to be a popular topic and the park is often approached by local and national media to discuss night sky preservation at National Park Service sites. It is anticipated that with the popularity and news coverage of the 2017 solar eclipse, interest in all aspects of astronomy will continue to grow.
- The Black Canyon Astronomical Society requested assistance with a regional radio feature called *Western Slope Skies*. Park staff members have written and recorded 7 radio spots on various astronomy and night sky related topics. All features can be found at: <http://kvnf.org/programs/western-slope-skies>

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is honored to be among the designated International Dark Sky Parks. With the continued support of park staff, partners, community members and volunteers, we very much look forward to another exciting year of astronomy in 2018.