



## **International Dark-Sky Association**

*"... to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies"*

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### **New Zealand's Aoraki Mackenzie Named World's Largest International Dark Sky Reserve**

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09 June 2012. TUCSON, AZ – Over 1,600 square miles of New Zealand's South Island have just been proclaimed as an International Dark Sky Reserve, making it the largest in the world. The Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR), comprised of the Aoraki/Mt. Cook National Park and the Mackenzie Basin, is the fourth such dark sky reserve in the world.

International Dark-Sky Association's Executive Director Bob Parks remarks, "The new reserve is coming in at a 'Gold' level status. That means the skies there are almost totally free from light pollution. To put it simply, it is one of the best stargazing sites on Earth."

This week's announcement coincides with the Third International Starlight Conference, a United Nations-led effort that emphasizes that a star-filled night sky is part of the common heritage of mankind and that protections are necessary to ensure that present and future generations will be able to see the stars. The new IDSR is playing host to the conference and sets a wonderful example for attendees.

Organizers of the new reserve recognize that the night sky has played a critical role in the area's history as its first residents, the Maori, used the night sky not only to navigate to the island but also integrated astronomy and star lore into their culture and daily lives. The reserve seeks to honor that history by keeping the night sky as a protected and integral part of the area's natural and cultural landscape. It is a perfect place to protect and honor those traditions as the IDSR's Mackenzie Basin has the clearest, darkest and the most spectacular night sky in New Zealand.

Outdoor lighting controls were first put into place in the area during the early 1980s. They have helped to minimize light pollution not only for the nearby Mt. John Observatory, but to conserve energy, protect wildlife and to make the area a popular stargazing destination for tourists. For the past several years increased efforts have been focused on strengthening these protections in the formation of the International Dark Sky Reserve.

## **About the IDSPlaces 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, four communities, ten parks and three reserves have also received International Dark Sky designations.

To learn more about the IDSPlaces program, please visit: <http://www.darksky.org/IDSPlaces>

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