

**South Llano River State Park**  
**2017 International Dark Sky Park Annual Report**  
**Reporting period: February 2017 (IDA designation) through September 2018**

**General:**

South Llano River State Park is located on the western edge of the Hill County, 5 miles south of the small town of Junction. The park was designated an International Dark Sky Park with a Gold-tier Status in February of 2017. The park maintains its IDA designation by offering dark sky education and outreach, and by continuously monitoring the park's dark skies with a permanently-installed Sky Quality Meter. The park has approximately 60,000 visitors during the past year, many of them overnight campers, and visitation is steadily increasing by about 15% annually. Since becoming an International Dark Sky park, we have seen an increase in visitor interest about stargazing. The park serves not only as a dark location to view the night sky, but also as a leader in the local community for dark sky education.

**Park Contacts:**

Scott Whitener, Park Superintendent  
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**Lighting in the Community:**

Junction adopted a Lighting Resolution in 2012. In September 2017, a City Council member and the Mayor met with the Hill Country Alliance to discuss the possibility of a lighting ordinance in the future.

In September of 2018, park staff observed a blinking light beacon a few miles from the park which was greatly affecting the park's night sky quality. Park Superintendent Scott Whitener worked with the FCC and other local authorities to request this light to be repaired. The owner of the light complied and this is no longer an issue.

**Sky Quality:** Sky Quality readings are taken every 15 minutes from dusk to dawn every day by the SQM that is permanently attached to the Interpreter's Office located near Park Headquarters. To access the latest readings, see our webpage:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/south-llano-river/dark-skies>

This web page also talks about Bortle Scale Readings, Naked Eye Limiting Magnitude (NELM), and a clear sky chart.

**Grants:**

In April of 2017, the park received a Texas State Parks competitive grant through the Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation. The park purchased a Celestron Nexstar Evolution 8 telescope, a solar filter, a planisphere, red light flashlights, and laser pointers with the grant money. Volunteers contributed 103 hours to this grant, assisting with public Star Parties and Dark Sky education. This grant was completed in May of 2018.

**Community and Media Relations:**

- Park Staff attends quarterly meetings of Hill Country area dark sky leaders.
- The park and its dark skies have been a feature in two publications: Texas Monthly magazine and the online publication, TexasHillCountry.com

**Education and Outreach:**

Star parties, held in conjunction with Mason Star Gazers, Texas Tech University at Junction Outdoor School, and local amateur astronomers, are held regularly throughout the year for park visitors. In addition, “Night Hikes” programs and talks about nocturnal animals are presented by park staff during the busy summer months, with a strong emphasis on conservation. Impromptu stargazing is often held during these night hikes.

Below are the park’s dark sky events from the reporting period of February 2017 to September 2018.

**Star Parties at South Llano River State Park:**

- 3/25/2017: IDA Designation Star Party – Including Junction Headstart families: 175 people
- 6/17/2017: 60 people
- 7/22/2017: 74 people
- 9/16/2017: Star Party with San Antonio Astronomical Association: 36 people (lower numbers than usual due to camping reservation cancellations)
- 12/02/2017: “North Star Party”, 79 people
- 02/03/2018: 28 people
- 03/24/2018: 52 people

**Outreach events:**

- 2/17/2017: Astronomy activity and nocturnal animals shared booth at San Antonio Botanical Gardens’ “Family Flashlight Night”: 150 people
- 3/18-19, 2017: Booth shared with Enchanted Rock SNA at Texas Night Sky Festival (43 people) and Dark Sky leaders breakfast in Dripping Springs,
- 5/19/2017 “Better Lights for Starry Nights” presentation with Dr. Bill Wren to entire Junction Independent School District: 650 people, mostly children
- 6/15/2017: Star Party with Texas Tech University Junction Outdoor School at TTUJOS: 63 people
- 11/11/2017: Dark Sky Education with Texas Wildlife Association’s “Women of the Land” event at Texas Tech University in Junction
- 1/19/2018: Star Party turned “telescope tour” due to clouds, with Mason Star Gazers, Mason: 6 people