

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Newport State Park Designated Wisconsin's First International Dark Sky Park**

ELLISON BAY, Wis. – Newport State Park, Wisconsin's only wilderness state park, has now also become the first state park in Wisconsin designated by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) as an International Dark Sky Park, one of just 48 parks in the world to earn the distinction.

Located at the northern tip of Door County on the western shore of Lake Michigan, Newport has a dark sky that offers excellent nighttime viewing with an unobstructed view of the eastern horizon. As a designated wilderness park, the 960-hectare (2,373-acre) park offers only backpack camping and has minimal developments beyond the park office and a picnic area with a park shelter.

“After more than 15 years, IDA International Dark Sky Places is still a program of firsts, and today is no exception,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend. “Newport's entry into the IDA family of International Dark Sky Parks is a welcomed development for Wisconsin and the protection of dark skies in the upper Midwest United States.”

With today's designation, Newport joins the ranks of such U.S. National Parks as Big Bend, Glacier and Grand Canyon. Only 13 other state parks in the United States have received IDA accreditation.

“The prestigious Dark Sky Park designation opens the park to local, regional, national and international astronomical clubs and societies, increasing tourism, especially ecotourism. Obtaining this honor will accord national and international recognition to Newport State Park and the Wisconsin State Park system,” said Ben Bergey, Wisconsin State Park System director.

The idea for applying for the designation began four years ago when Ray Stonecipher, a local Door County amateur astronomer and member of the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society, approached Park Superintendent Michelle Hefty about seeking the designation.

“In a modern world that is accompanied by ever increasing levels of nighttime illumination, a truly dark sky at night is rare and unique,” explained Hefty. Sensing the value of dark night skies at Newport, Hefty agreed to formally launch the certification effort.

Newport’s supporting partners for the Dark Sky Park project include the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society, the Newport Wilderness Society, the parks friends group, and a committee of dedicated volunteers. Park staff carried out the work to complete the lengthy application and will continue to ensure the park meets IDA guidelines.

“From lighting projects to community education and outreach, our commitment to protect our dark sky is a priority we take seriously,” said Beth Bartoli, a Newport State Park naturalist who helps conduct astronomy programs at the park. “We never tire of seeing that ‘aha moment on the upturned faces of our visitors as they gaze toward the heavens.”

The park will host a dedication ceremony on Thursday, June 22 at which time an official International Dark Sky Park sign will be placed in the park. The ceremony will feature talks by members of the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society and Newport Wilderness Society as well as local officials. The ceremony will begin at 1 p.m. at the park shelter and is open to the public with light refreshments served afterward.

For more information about Newport State Park, visit the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website](#).

### **About the IDA Dark Sky Places 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, 15 Communities, 48

Parks, 11 Reserves, two Sanctuaries and three Dark Sky Friendly Developments of Distinction have received International Dark Sky designations. For more information about the International Dark Sky Places Program, visit <http://darksky.org/idsp>.

### **About IDA**

The International Dark Sky Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, advocates for the protection of the nighttime environment and dark night skies by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and promoting environmentally responsible outdoor lighting. More information about IDA and its mission may be found at <http://www.darksky.org>.

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