

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Big Bend Ranch State Park Named  
World's Newest International Dark Sky Park**

TERLINGUA, Tex. (21 November 2017) – The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is proud to announce that Big Bend Ranch State Park (BBRSP) has been designated as an International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). It is the fourth Texas State Park to receive the honor, joining neighboring Big Bend National Park, which received IDA accreditation in 2012. Together, they form one of the largest contiguous areas under dark-skies protection in the United States.

“Big Bend Ranch State Park’s achievement in becoming an IDA International Dark Sky Park is an important step forward in the conservation of some of the darkest night skies remaining in the lower 48 states,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend. “Along with neighboring Big Bend National Park, we have now secured the protection of natural nighttime darkness over an area larger than the U.S. state of Rhode Island.”

Big Bend Ranch State Park is located in the remote and rugged Trans-Pecos region of Far West Texas. The park is bounded by the Rio Grande River and the steep mesas of Mexico to the south and vast rural ranchland to the north. At 315,000 acres, BBRSP is the largest park in the Texas State Park system. The park lies within the Chihuahuan Desert, is home to a diversity of plants and animals, and has a deep human history. BBRSP joins Copper Breaks State Park, South Llano River State Park and Enchanted Rock State Park in holding the prestigious IDA designation.

“Big Bend Ranch State Park is known for its remote location and the feeling of being in the wilderness,” noted Mark Lockwood, Region 1 Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “Preserving the dark sky is key to that experience and something all visitors treasure.”

As part of its certification effort, BBRSP inventoried and assessed the condition of all outdoor lighting in the park, created an effective management plan for current and future lighting installations, and developed a program to educate park visitors and area residents about the importance of dark night skies and the benefits of quality outdoor lighting. Additionally, BBRSP has invested in its staff, offering professional development opportunities and materials related to dark skies.

As part of its dark-sky initiative, BBRSP will launch a Dark Sky Steward program as a way to involve the public in helping monitor the condition of the park’s night skies over time. The program enlists volunteers with an interest or expertise in astronomy and/or astrophotography to gather observations of the night sky from various locations in the park. The observations and images generated by our volunteers will be used to track the quality of the night sky, as well as for promotional and educational purposes in interpretive and outreach programs. The park will host an event to celebrate our designation in the near future.

The IDA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, which advocates for the protection of the nighttime environment and dark night skies. It does so by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and through the promotion of environmentally responsible outdoor lighting. The 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. Currently, 16 Communities, 57 Parks, 11 Reserves, three Sanctuaries and four Dark Sky Friendly Developments of Distinction are recognized with International Dark Sky Places designations.

Contact Amber Harrison at the Barton Warnock Visitor Center at 432-424-3327 for more information on the Dark Sky Steward program and visit the Dark Skies Program page ([https://tpwd.texas.gov/spdest/programs/dark\\_skies/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/spdest/programs/dark_skies/)) on the TPWD website to learn more about the initiative.

More information about the IDA, its mission and work may be found at <http://www.darksky.org>. Also visit <http://darksky.org/idsp> find out more about the International Dark Sky Places conservation program.

### **Media Inquiries**

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