

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Staunton River State Park Named First International Dark Sky Park In Virginia

TUCSON, Ariz., and SCOTTSBURG, Va. (10 July 2015) – Natural nighttime darkness is a rapidly vanishing American resource east of the Mississippi River, and few locations remain where stargazers can find dark night skies within easy reach. The preservation of dark spots in America's parks and protected lands is important to ensure the well being of wildlife and accessibility of dark skies for future generations. Virginia's Staunton River State Park is one of these critical nighttime habitats. As a result of local actions undertaken to secure the integrity of the park's naturally dark nights, The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) now recognizes Staunton River as the first International Dark Sky Park in the Old Dominion.

"We are pleased to recognize the efforts at Staunton River State Park to protect Virginia's dark night skies," IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend said. "The new Dark Sky Park is truly a gem that all Virginians should treasure."

Staunton River State Park is a 2,400-acre property situated squarely in the heart of southern Virginia about 25 miles north of the North Carolina border. Its landscape of forests and meadows along the banks of the Dan and Staunton rivers are popular with outdoor enthusiasts of all stripes. In addition to various recreation opportunities, the park offers overnight accommodations in campgrounds and historic cabins built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In recent years the park management became aware of the appeal of the site's naturally dark nighttime character and began welcoming visitors specifically coming to take advantage of viewing its dark night skies. The park first hosted the Staunton River Star Party in fall 2011 and the 2014 edition attracted 140 participants from around the region.

"Staunton River State Park has been a destination for outdoor recreation of all types and a steward of southern Virginia's natural resources for nearly 80 years," Park Manager Adam Layman explained. "Our dark skies are an important natural resource, and one that we strive to protect just as we do our lands, waters, and wildlife."

In addition to raising the park's profile as an astronomy destination through an extensive outreach campaign, the management established a quality outdoor lighting policy and brought 80 percent of the park's lighting into compliance with that policy by the time IDA received the Dark Sky Park application. All involved expect the park's influence in the area to grow as it sets a positive example of good lighting for visitors and continues to provide regular opportunities for stargazing.

"Becoming a Dark Sky Park will ensure that generations of guests of Staunton River State Park will be able to observe and learn about the heavens above," Layman said.

The influence of Staunton River State Park's designation is already being felt elsewhere among Virginia's public lands. "Virginia State Parks, specifically Staunton River State Park, is honored

to be granted this designation,” said Director of Virginia State Parks Craig Seaver. “Plans are currently underway to pursue implementation of applicable dark sky design principles at other Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation properties.”

Images



Left: The summer Milky Way sets over Staunton River State Park, Virginia (Credit: Steve Andrews) <http://bit.ly/1R87Q7P>

Right: Sky watchers await the end of dusk at Staunton River State Park, Virginia (Credit: Steve Andrews) <http://bit.ly/1env0Fi>

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, 10 Communities, 25 Parks and nine Reserves have received International Dark Sky designations. For more information about the International Dark Sky Places Program, visit <http://darksky.org/night-sky-conservation/dark-sky-places>.

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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