

MEMBERSPOTLIGHT



FRIENDS OF NEVADA WILDERNESS

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WHY ARE DARK SKIES IMPORTANT?

Before the Industrial Revolution, celestial navigation was the norm and almost everyone could look up at night and see the bright expanse of the Milky Way. Now, only 150 years later, nearly 80% of the world lives under light polluted skies. Our children are growing up having never experienced a truly dark sky and many Americans have never even seen the Milky Way. This plea to protect the dark often appeals to our emotional and nostalgic sensibilities but there is more to it than just the feeling of awe we get when we look at a dark night sky teeming with stars. Light pollution also affects our environment, our safety, our energy consumption and pocketbooks, and ultimately, our health.

Nearly 30% of the artificial light that we use shines when and where it is not needed. According to the IDA, that's the equivalent of \$3.3 billion and 21 million tons of carbon dioxide inadvertently wasted each year. Studies have even shown that artificial light has a placebo effect on our sense of safety. Bright, glaring lights create sharp contrast between light and darkness, making the area outside of an illuminated area difficult to see. Sharp contrasts between light and darkness also create deep shadows that offer concealment. Additionally, nighttime glare from bright, blue-rich street lights heightens safety concerns, driver discomfort and visual impairment.

Not convinced yet? Plants and animals have evolved to depend on the Earth's natural day/night cycle and any disruption in that pattern can affect migration patterns, predator-prey relationships, nutrition and reproduction. Humans are animals too, and just like animals, we have evolved to rely on the day-night cycle to survive. The natural pattern of darkness and light governs the circadian rhythm- our "biological clock"- which produces melatonin as a response. When that pattern is disrupted, it suppresses our melatonin production which in turn affects our whole body, including our immune and lymphatic systems, thyroid function, cholesterol, and much more.

Here in Nevada we are lucky. Even standing in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip, you're only a few hours' drive from Tonopah, NV- one of the darkest towns in the lower 48.

SANCTUARY SERENDIPITY

Imagine casually flipping through Time Magazine when a light pollution map of the United States catches your eye. The East Coast is pretty bright, but as your eyes move westward, you notice a really BIG dark spot and it's right where you live and work. That is the situation Jen Rovanner found herself in one lazy Sunday afternoon and she was struck with an idea: what if we could find a way to recognize and celebrate that darkness?

Background photo by Richie Bednarski



Jen reached out to Friends of Nevada Wilderness and after some brainstorming and deliberation, the Massacre Rim Wilderness Study Area was settled on as the center of a significant dark sky conservation effort. With its remote location, distinct borders, and almost total lack of light pollution, Massacre Rim seemed like a great starting point for an International Dark Sky Sanctuary certification effort.

On March 19, 2019 after years of research, documentation, data collection, and management plans, the sanctuary received notification that the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) had approved the Massacre Rim Dark Sky Sanctuary to become a certified Dark Sky Place. Dark Sky Sanctuary Status, one of five categories of IDA accolades, is considered the most prestigious, and darkest of the awarded certifications — a title which Massacre Rim undoubtedly deserves.

Although the sanctuary is in a remote corner of Northwestern Nevada, it is gaining local notoriety as a destination for star gazers and astro-tourists looking for high quality night sky views. The silence and solitude of the area makes it a truly unique experience.



Photo by Kirk Peterson

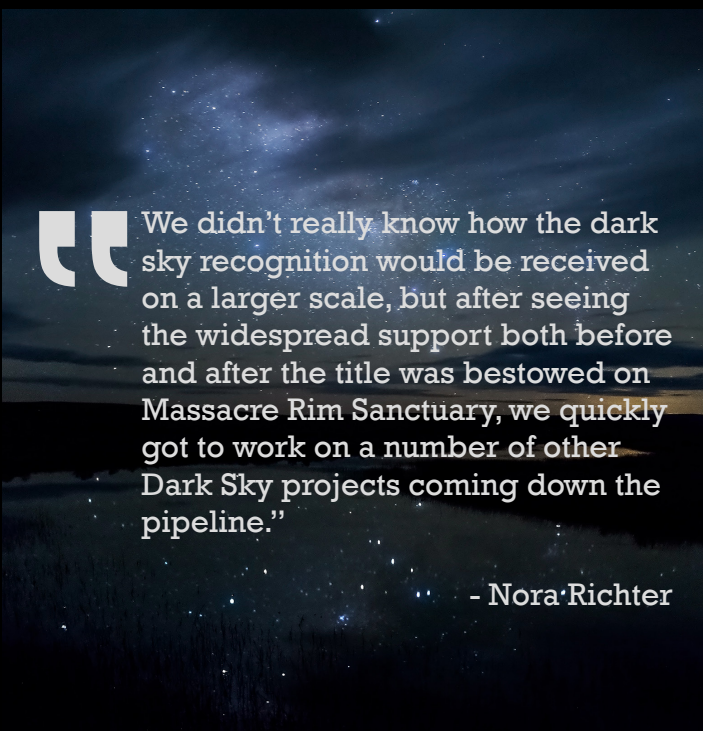
WHAT ELSE IS BREWING WITH FRIENDS OF NEVADA WILDERNESS?

Under an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Friends of Nevada Wilderness staff will be monitoring and recording sky quality meter (SQM) readings in the BLM managed Wilderness Areas, National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, and Wilderness Study Areas throughout Nevada to gauge the quality of the dark skies in the rest of the state.

In 2020, an *episode* aired on KNPB's show 'Wild Nevada', featuring the Massacre Rim Dark Sky Sanctuary and the work Friends of Nevada Wilderness has done to preserve this special piece of Nevada's dark sky legacy. FNW has become more closely involved with the Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperative, and recently participated in the group's virtual star party on September 5th, 2020.

There are a few limited edition Massacre Rim Dark Sky Sanctuary Retro-Inspired posters by Tyler Nordgren still available on the Friends of Nevada Wilderness website: www.nevadawilderness.org/shop

This recognition has been a long time in the making and has required immeasurable amounts of time and effort by FNW staff, volunteers, and Bureau of Land Management partners. We are all so excited to share this special piece of the night sky!



“ We didn't really know how the dark sky recognition would be received on a larger scale, but after seeing the widespread support both before and after the title was bestowed on Massacre Rim Sanctuary, we quickly got to work on a number of other Dark Sky projects coming down the pipeline.”

- Nora Richter

Photo by Richie Bednarski