

MEMBERSPOTLIGHT



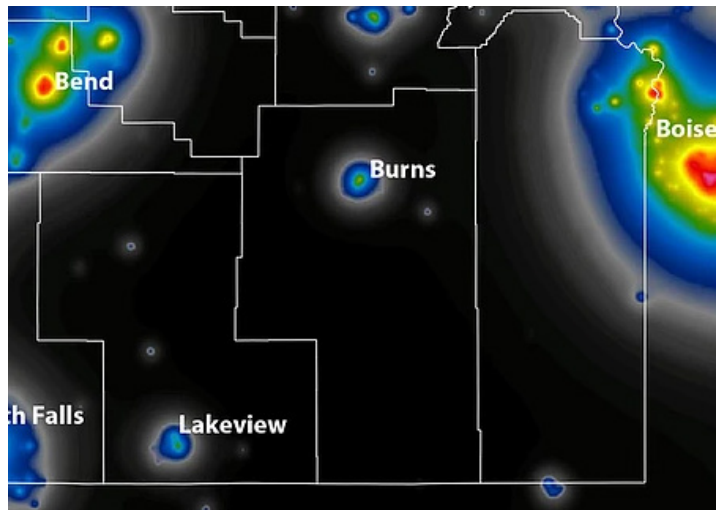
OREGON OUTBACK DARK SKY NETWORK

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Imagine a high desert place with minimal population where artificial light at night is barely apparent within a few town centers, a place where the sky is inky black against pin-point bright stars, and where all the details of the Milky Way are visible. Imagine being able to see the Orion and Lagoon Nebulae (both star-making factories) and the Andromeda Galaxy (at 2.5 million lights years away) with your naked eye! Imagine the quiet serenity of alkaline lakes, sage-covered basins and forested mountains hosting state and federal wildlife refuges, rambling ranches, and geologic wonders. You just imagined the Southeastern Region of Oregon, the northernmost area of the Basin and Range Geographic Province known as the "Oregon Outback."

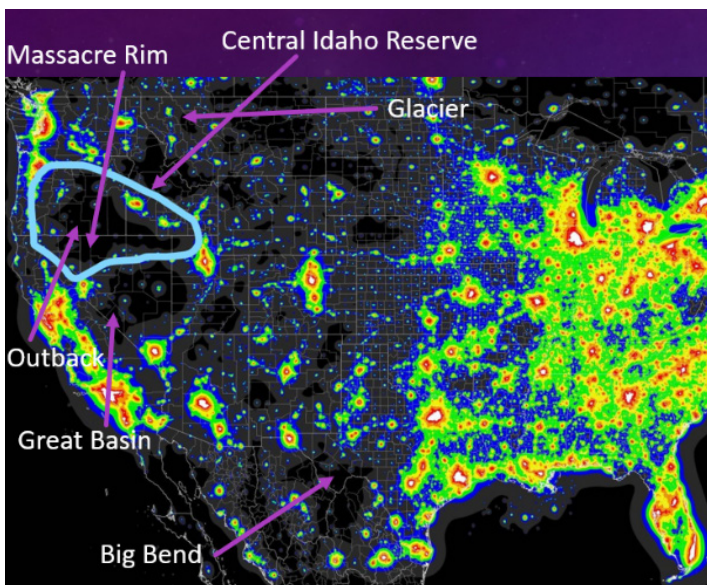
Though most travelers think of Lake County when they think of the Outback, thanks to great content by [Travel Southern Oregon](#) and the [Oregon Outback Scenic Byway](#) designation, much of Harney and Malheur Counties (neighbors to the east) are also part of the Basin and Range. These three counties comprise a land area of 28,472 square miles — an area between the size of West Virginia and South Carolina.



The Oregon Outback.

In Nevada, just a few miles south of the Oregon border and part of the same pristine dark sky zone, is Massacre Rim Dark Sky Sanctuary. There is "dark," and then there is a pristine darkness that few people have ever experienced — a darkness that can overpower you with awe. These are the skies of the Oregon Outback, the skies that the [Oregon Outback Dark Sky Network](#) (ODSN) was formed to celebrate and protect.

Like the Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperative (BRDSC), the Oregon Outback Dark Sky Network is a voluntary grass-roots initiative to build an alliance of communities, businesses, local governments, ranchers, state and federal agencies, tribes, and Oregon Outback night sky enthusiasts to support a set of shared principles resulting in mutual community benefits and the long-term conservation of our starry night heritage.



Pockets of natural darkness can be found from Big Bend National Park all the way up to Glacier National Park.



The ODSN has brought together a diverse group of stakeholders who support a community-based, landscape-scale approach to dark sky conservation. To date, the majority of Network supporters are affiliated with Lake County and include the Lake County Chamber of Commerce (with the enthusiastic leadership of Director Jessica Bogardus), Travel Southern Oregon (with the communications savvy of Bob Hackett), PLAYA at Summer Lake (with the artistic inspiration of Chelsea Peil), the leaders of the Lakeview District of the Bureau of Land Management, the Fremont-Winema National Forest, the USFWS's Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, and numerous community advocates including ranchers, business owners, elected officials, photographers, and local educators.

When you visit Lakeview, the seat of Lake County, you can shop for dark sky accoutrements from star charts and telescopes to dark sky-inspired coffee and cocktails. Similar enthusiasm for dark skies can also be found in Harney and Malheur Counties. In Frenchglen you can go stargazing with Oregon Star Safari up on Steens Mountain. In the Owyhee Canyonlands you can team up with an outfitter to boat by day and stargaze by night.

It didn't take long for the Outback Network to learn about the Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve and to realize that the Outback too has rare, natural treasures worthy of special protection. Stakeholder meetings, celebrations, and conversations across the Outback have focused on nominating one or more large sites as an International Dark Sky Place. For Lake County in particular, the challenge has been deciding which dark sky place nomination should be pursued.

One nomination type under consideration is that of "dark sky reserve". Dark sky reserves are large areas including multiple communities surrounding a dark sky core. The required level of darkness for a reserve is much lower than that found in the Outback where pristine skies abound, and with nearly all of the County as a "core" where does one draw the core boundary without being arbitrary?



The Oregon Outback offers a haven for dark-sky enthusiasts.

Another nomination classification under exploration is that of "dark sky sanctuary." With approximately 77% of the County under public ownership, multiple land agencies in alliance, and with skies boasting Bortle 1 and 2 class skies (the darkest of dark), the county readily meets the darkness and remoteness criteria for a dark sky sanctuary. Needless to say, this unique region is well suited to pursue an International Dark Sky Place nomination.

The Network recognizes that civic engagement is the foundation for a shared stewardship of our starry sky heritage. Through community networking the ODSN will continue to share approaches across the region for adopting policy and promoting educational outreach in support of natural night skies.

For more information on the dark skies within the Outback watch the first 13 minutes from [Oregon Field Guide Season 31, Episode 9](#) and watch this informative video on the Outback, [When We Go Into the Dark](#) produced by Rick R uf of Space Cave Recording Arts. A short summary of Rick's video, as seen during BRDSC's Virtual Star Party can be found at this [link](#).