

Dark Skies

The City of Flagstaff and the northern Arizona region have achieved worldwide recognition for innovative leadership in the protection of dark skies. Beginning with Ordinance 400 in 1958 that addressed searchlights, over a half-century of policy decisions and implementations have fostered an astronomy industry that now includes Lowell Observatory, the U.S. Naval Observatory, the Navy Prototype Optical Interferometer, the National Undergraduate Research Observatory, the U.S. Geological Survey Astrogeology Center, and the new Discovery Channel Telescope. Public support for protection of the night sky for both general enjoyment and professional deep space research has become an established element of community and regional identity.

Zoning Codes that restricted the amount of light per acre in outdoor lighting installations were approved by both the City and the County in 1989, and since then the codes have been periodically updated and strengthened. On October 24, 2001, Flagstaff was recognized as the world's First International Dark Sky City for its pioneering work balancing preservation of our night sky natural resource with concerns about public safety and economic security. Rather than allow this significant economic and cultural inheritance to be degraded, the region's hard-won reputation and accomplishments are acknowledged as vital assets that must continue to be enhanced.

To remain one of the premiere astronomic sites in the world, to properly recognize preservation of naturally dark night skies as a persistent expression of community values, and to better-utilize a critical economic and tourism attractant, the region must implement evolving standards that proactively address problems associated with increased artificial light, air pollution, illuminated signage, and development - both adjacent to major scientific instruments and within the region.

These goals can be realized by:

1. Addressing non-conforming lighting currently exempted by 'grandfathered' regulations; and
2. Developing tighter control of so-called "trespass" lighting that allows involuntarily impacts on properties beyond on-site uses.



Photo by: Shabo Zhang

DARK SKIES GOALS AND POLICIES

Goal E&C.5. Preserve dark skies as an unspoiled natural resource, basis for an important economic sector, and core element of community character.

Policy E&C.5.1. Evaluate the impacts of the retention of dark skies regarding lighting infrastructure and regulatory changes, land use decisions or changes, and proposed transportation developments within the region.

Policy E&C.5.2. Encourage and incentivize voluntary reduction of "exempt" lighting that degrades night sky visibility, and work to prevent light trespass whenever possible in both public and private areas.

Policy E&C.5.3. Continue to enforce dark sky ordinances.

Policy E&C.5.4. Encourage uses within Lighting Zone I of the lighting codes of the City and County that do not require outdoor lighting, and discourage those which require all-night lighting.

