

Finding the Rabbit in the Moon

Tips for a Successful Dark Sky Application

Vast Engelmann spruce forests and sagebrush mesas extend to the horizon. Artificial light sources are limited, and the dry mountain air naturally favors clear views of the night sky. Visitors and locals alike are astounded by the celestial wonders of meteor showers, the faint and mysterious glow of the Milky Way, and the multitude of visible stars. Conditions are ripe for the area to become a dark sky park if only there was a special someone to take the next steps and put an application together.

Thankfully, having recently been through the process of becoming a dark sky park at Curecanti National Recreation Area, I can help guide this special someone along the way. What follows are tips for creating that successful application.



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Moonrise, Curecanti National Recreation Area, 2015. NPS Image.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

No one should try to create an application from scratch. This is way too much work and it is easy to become discouraged. Even great storytellers such as William Shakespeare and Nathaniel Hawthorne based their tales on stories that already existed. Chill, don't stress, and use the models, checklists, and guidelines provided by the International Dark Sky Association at www.darksky.org/our-work/conservation/idsp/become-a-dark-sky-place/. First submit an inquiry and International Dark Sky Association staff will provide an initial assessment of site eligibility and the next steps to be taken.

Luck favors the prepared

Intrepid wilderness explorer Pierre-Esprit Radisson said that "luck favors the prepared." Likewise, luck favors those who do the required research and work. Get going on that lighting inventory. Contact neighbors, visitors, and fellow night sky supporters. Venture out when the night sky is clear and get those light readings done. Start arranging for good outdoor lighting policies. The application is not going to complete itself.

The fault in our stars

"The fault is not in our stars," said Marcus Brutus in Julius Caesar "but in ourselves." In other words, fault lies not in our fortunes, but in ourselves. Because of the high turnover rate in the National Park Service and other agencies there is a tendency to leave work for others who take our places. Let's face it, there is a tendency to leave MOST of our work for others. Do not let this happen. Once the process of applying to become a dark sky park is started then stay committed to seeing it through to the end.

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Typically when facing obstacles, we fail to consider views other than our own. Instead, reach out to others for enlightenment and encouragement. In listening to others with different perspectives we understand our own places better and the steps we need to take to get back on track.

About the Author

Matt Johnson is the District Interpreter at Curecanti National Recreation Area for the National Park Service. On August 5, 2021, Curecanti became the first National Recreation area to obtain IDA Dark Sky Park status.



The Milky Way Galaxy viewed from Elk Creek. NPS Image by Troy Hunt.

The Japanese say that there is not a man in the full moon, but a rabbit. It is much easier to see a rabbit than a man. Similarly, we can learn to see the rabbit in our obstacles. Viewing challenges in different ways can help us get past them. We are never truly alone. People will help, even if they think they cannot. Just ask, listen, and think. It is then that you see the rabbit. Perhaps you can do it together.

Best wishes with your application. I hope you find the rabbit.



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COLORADO PLATEAU DARK SKY COOPERATIVE GUEST SPOTLIGHT