



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.)  
National Public Observatory Newsletter  
***“Where the Public Meets the Stars”***

Astronomy education, dark skies and quality experiences for ALL!!  
www.Astro-npo.org

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STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN FIVE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Spring 2005

## Astronomy groups help El Paso Astronomy Club celebrate darker skies

By Jessica Savage

LAS CRUCES - Over the next 10 years, when Southern New Mexicans look south at night that familiar bright orange-pink glow should gradually diminish allowing for better astronomy observing. It took nearly as long to pass the city ordinance that gathered together regional astronomy enthusiasts in mid February to celebrate the civic feat.

"Nine days ago the vote was seven to one," said Director John Peterson of the Gene Roddenberry Planetarium. He was referring to the city council vote that passed a lighting ordinance for the city of over a half-million people.

Before introducing the main speaker, John Dobson, inventor of the Dobsonian telescope, Peterson recounted the steps and highlights of the passing of the ordinance and credited Dobson with being the impetus for the journey.

"In 1994 we were having a star party at Hueco Tanks and John Dobson was there," Peterson recalled. The El Paso Astronomy Club had invited local television interviewer and celebrity Raymond Mesa to the party and Dobson told him, "We have to shield lights from here to Alamogordo." Mesa didn't exactly know what to make of a statement like that but Peterson said, "That began the long road."

Back in 1999, National Public Observatory President John Gilkison began meeting with El Paso committees, along with representatives of the McDonald Observatory, located within a 100 miles of the bright region nicknamed the Sun City.

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Gilkison said he eventually settled into a role as technical consultant to the Business Zone Advisory Committee, meeting with them seven or eight times over a period of two years as they wrote the articles to the ordinance.

"The ordinance has to say something worthwhile," Gilkison said. "It has to control lighting in a meaningful way."

By 2001, the committee had written an ordinance, which they recommended to the city in a vote of 27 to 0. However, the push to pass it stalled for about three years, Peterson said. Meanwhile the El Paso Women's Club was impressed with an International Dark Skies presentation they heard and decided to make shielded lights one of their main causes to champion. Eventually, the ordinance got back to the city council but was met with opposition by businesses. New car dealerships on Interstate 10 with flood lights opposed the ordinance but motorists opposed the blinding effects of their lighting. After listening to presentations, Peterson said they soon had the El Paso Police Department, the El Paso Times newspaper and 27 housing associations taking a pro-lighting ordinance stance. The momentum to pass the ordinance was growing.

The only sour note was that some of the stricter language controlling lighting levels in the ordinance was pulled out at the end of the process, Peterson told the audience of astronomy enthusiasts that included members of the El Paso Astronomy Club, the Las Cruces Astronomical League and the NPO. Everyone celebrated anyway, as the El Paso Comprehensive Outdoor Lighting ordinance is still a very strong ordinance.

"It will help people install lighting that's in their own 'enlightened' self interest," Gilkison said. "I'm amazed they pulled it off."

So far Las Cruces, Alamogordo and now El Paso have lighting ordinances. There are efforts to pass ordinances in Mesilla, and Deming . But Gilkison said the next big challenge for dark sky enthusiasts is - Albuquerque!



Heroes of the hour, left to right, Cory Stone, President of El Paso Astronomy Club, and John Peterson, Director of the El Paso Independent School District Planetarium.

## State Parks seek legislative funds for public outreach astronomy

By Jessica Savage

New Mexico State Parks will lead the nation in rural night sky education if park officials are able to secure funding for their proposed programs and equipment.

The New Mexico State Parks Night Sky Initiative is currently in legislative committee as Governor Bill Richardson-backed House Bill 371. The initiative proposes to abate existing light pollution in state parks, fund programs and maintain existing telescope equipment with an \$82,000 legislative appropriation.

"This would be a tremendous boost for us in many ways," Park Resource Specialist Steve Cary said in correspondence seeking letters of support from the National Public Observatory.

The initiative acknowledges the "considerable time and expertise" volunteer astronomers, such as the Stars-N-Parks night sky interpretive guides, donate to the parks. Cary said he anticipates putting out requests for proposals from organizations like the NPO if they receive the appropriation.

Last year the NPO received a \$4,000 grant to fund its Stars-N-Parks astronomy programs under a public outreach category from the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium. NPO officials intended to apply for a 2005 funding renewal but the consortium wasn't able to fund the public outreach portion of their grants because of cuts by NASA, their parent organization.

State parks hosted 75 night sky programs in fiscal year 2004 according to the initiative, which means nearly a third of the programs were sponsored and conducted by the NPO. The majority of the funds sought for their initiative, \$70,000

**Thirteen day old Moon, DSC-W1 digicam shot through a SN-6 with a 40 mm Scopetronic's eyepiece and adaptor.**



**One shot color, Orion Nebula, 30 second parfocal exposure with a Sony DSC-W1 Digital camera through a 12 inch SCT, 40 mm Scopetronic's eyepiece and adaptor.**

will fund program coordination. Currently five park employees spend 5 percent of their time on night sky efforts, the proposal says. The funding will allow parks to either appoint one person to head up night sky programs or contract this service out. They anticipate operating expenses of this to take the form of travel, maintenance and repairs, educational supplies and marketing.

Another important aspect of the initiative is a commitment to the Dark Sky Protection Act, enacted in 1999 by the state legislature. State parks wants to take this to the next level by setting examples within the parks of shielded lighting and appropriate fixtures. They also want to set an example for the nation on what a dark sky state should do. By taking advantage of New Mexico's unique dark sky assets, the initiative says, the parks will become the focus of economic development related to astronomy tourism in some of the states most rural and underdeveloped areas.

"For many towns, the nearest state park is a vital economic asset," the initiative says.

At least one famous amateur astronomer agrees that the state should be a dark sky leader.

"New Mexico - the dark sky state," should be our new motto according to John Dobson, creator of the Dobsonian telescope. Dobson was in Las Cruces in mid-February to acknowledge the passing of a light ordinance by the city of El Paso and the 75th anniversary of the discovery of Pluto by the late Clyde Tombaugh, a Las Cruces native.

At least one state in the nation should have fully shielded lighting and New Mexico is the best candidate Dobson said in an interview. "It used to be in our flyer. I've always had this idea," the 89-year-old dark sky enthusiast said. "I'm for New Mexico to do it."

So far the bill has passed unanimously through the House Energy and National Resources Committee and is currently in the House Appropriations and Finance Committee.



**Jenkins' Meade LPI CCD shot of Jupiter taken in the Fall of 2004. Image was of a series stacked.**

## State Parks seek legislative funds for public outreach astronomy

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A finance committee report recommends passing the bill.

**Send letters of support to your state senators and representatives at: State Senator/ Representative \_\_\_\_\_, State Capitol, Santa Fe, NM 87501 or call 505-986-4600.**

**To find your representative go to <http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/legislatorsearch.asp>**

## NPO Preparing for the Spring 2005 Southern New Mexico Star Party

The NPO is getting ready for the Spring 2005 Southern New Mexico Star Party which runs from Thursday April 7, to Sunday April 10th, 2005. Registration forms available online. [www.Astro-npo.org](http://www.Astro-npo.org)

At the EPAC meeting we passed out registration forms informing the attendees that the NPO was offering NPO membership rates for the star party to members of the EPAC, ASLC, and the AAC. We feel anyone supporting an astronomy club in southern New Mexico is supporting astronomy and are supporting dark sky initiatives.

Also new for the Spring SNMSP the NPO will have a power center cart available so we don't have to rely on extension cords being run over 350 feet back to electric site one. The cart will consist of a 115 amp hour battery, a high quality battery charger, and a 400 watt inverter. Also we will have two reel type extension cords with four outlets on each reel. We also have a 150 watt inverter to add to the cart if we need more capacity. The cart can be transported daily to a electric outlet for recharging the battery.

The SNMSP did make the events calendar of the April Sky & Telescope magazine. We already have people beginning to register so register early, as space is limited.

This year at the SNMSP we have a treat on Friday April 8th in the form of an afternoon partial eclipse of the Sun. The eclipse is annular in Costa Rica, but is only between 10% and 15% in New Mexico. We plan on having at least two sets of optics set up to show off the event, so join us at the SNMSP for a partial solar eclipse.

We look forward to seeing you at the Spring SNMSP.

## The I.T. News

The National Public Observatory has set up a new URL for our NPO website. We will still be carrying the old URL [www.Astronomy-National-Public-Observatory.org](http://www.Astronomy-National-Public-Observatory.org) until February of 2006 when it will lapse. You may access the NPO website by using the new URL [www.Astro-npo.org](http://www.Astro-npo.org) We will continue to license this URL from now on, which we think people will have a easier time remembering.



NPO Publicist Jessica Savage poses with John Dobson (creator of the Dobsonian telescope) at an El Paso restaurant before the EPAC meeting.

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**ABOUT THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY PROJECT**

*Tens of thousands of people visit major U.S. research astronomical observatories every year. These research facilities do not advertise, and quite altruistically, set aside monies and time from their limited budgets to accommodate the public. Many people travel great distances for the opportunity to observe through a world-class telescope but due to the high cost of telescope time, this generally is not feasible. Where observatories have been able to set aside a night for public observing, it is often booked up well in advance.*

*While some upscale observatory/lodge facilities have been developed, none have been established to reach families or individuals looking for an intimate public park/camping experience with the proper telescopes, facilities, and knowledgeable tour guides.*

*The National Public Observatory, Inc. has been established to provide this kind of facility and we need your help.*

*Please join the National Public Observatory or make your tax-deductible contribution today!*