

Article by Donna Bollenbach,  
with Jen Benson-Hughes

# ★ ★ ★ Friends of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve News from the Florida Prairie

*Where the rare is commonplace.*



The Milky Way and lightning  
put on a show in the summer at  
Kissimmee Prairie Preserve.

—Photo ©Stan Czaplicki



The Andromeda Galaxy, M31  
Kissimmee Prairie Preserve

—Photo ©Charles Lillo

Kissimmee Prairie Preserve  
was designated an  
**International Dark Sky Park**  
by the IDA (International  
Dark-Sky Association) in  
January, 2016 —Florida's  
first Dark Sky Place.

## Preserving the Night

*And a thousand little bells that twinkle and laugh...*

*“Before we invented civilization our ancestors lived mainly in the open out under the sky. Before we devised artificial lights and atmospheric pollution and modern forms of nocturnal entertainment we watched the stars. There were practical calendar reasons of course but there was more to it than that. Even today the most jaded city dweller can be unexpectedly moved upon encountering a clear night sky studded with thousands of twinkling stars. When it happens to me after all these years it still takes my breath away.”*

Carl Sagan— *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*

**H**ave you ever lay on your back in the middle of a dark field and tried to count the stars? Have you ever wished on a star? Have you ever looked to the stars for comfort when thinking about a lost loved one? Have the twinkling stars ever laughed or cried with you?

Yes, yes, yes and yes, and like Carl Sagan, when I am camping at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve (KPP) and emerge from my tent in the middle of the night, the millions of stars in the dark sky takes my breath away! Not so true when I am closer to home. There are far fewer stars visible. Artificial lights from homes and businesses bleach out the stars and steal the darkness. While it seems hard to imagine this happening in a place as remote as Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, it is a real possibility unless we take action now to preserve the night sky.

Preserving a night sky starts with controlling the direction and amount of artificial lighting in the area. KPP ranger **Jen Benson**, who spearheaded the initiative to designate the Preserve as an official Dark Sky Park, says “The most essential thing to do is to point the light to where it is needed (shielded, so the light is not escaping into the sky)

and to turn off the lights when they are no longer needed.” She also points out that although the beauty of the night sky is a good reason to promote the dark skies program, the hazards of light pollution are also directly related to the health and well being of both humans and wildlife:

- **Circadian rhythms** (biological clocks) are linked to the light-dark cycle. Humans and wildlife are dependent on a proper balance of light and dark within each 24 hour cycle to stay healthy. Disrupted circadian rhythms, which can be caused by light pollution, are associated with increased heart problems, eating and sleep disorders. **Natural rhythms equal better health.**
- **Melatonin secretion** (the hormone that causes sleep) is triggered by darkness. Exposure to light inhibits the melatonin secretion and is a common source of sleep disorders. While the effects of a sleepless night are well known to most people, it is also associated with many diseases, such as Cushing’s disease, psoriasis, birth defects, cancers and many more. **Better sleep equals less disease.**

*continued—*

Visit our website at: [www.KissimmeePrairieFriends.org](http://www.KissimmeePrairieFriends.org)

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## Preserving the Night, page 2



Eclipse of the Moon from  
Kissimmee Prairie Preserve.

—Photo ©Christina Evans



California nebula, Kissimmee  
Prairie Preserve

—Photo ©Charles Lillo

The California Nebula (NGC 1499) pictured above is an emission nebula located in the constellation Perseus. It is so named because it appears to resemble the outline of the US State of California on long exposure photographs. It is almost 2.5° long on the sky and, because of its very low surface brightness, it is extremely difficult to observe visually. It can be observed with a H-Beta filter (isolates the H-Beta line at 486 nm) in a rich-field telescope under dark skies. It lies at a distance of about 1,000 light years from Earth.

Charles Lillo - [theastrogeeks.com](http://theastrogeeks.com)

- Headaches can be triggered by light. Many people experience a headache from the constant glare of artificial light, but such lighting is also a major trigger for migraines in people who are susceptible to them. *Less artificial light equals fewer headaches.*
- Humans are diurnal, but for our nocturnal counterparts (30% of vertebrates and 60% of invertebrates) excessive artificial light at night disrupts their eating and reproduction cycles. One example is the declining populations of fireflies because they need darkness to attract a mate. Owls, bats, raccoons and coyotes lose their advantage of specialized night vision and their hunting hours are decreased due to unnatural light sources. *Decreasing artificial light equals better wildlife habitat.*

So, what is the Preserve doing to reduce light pollution and protect the future of the dark skies? Kissimmee Prairie Preserve completed the process of becoming an **International Dark Sky Park** and work continues to meet stringent requirements in order to maintain this important designation.

The Preserve has special equipment, including a Sky Quality Meter purchased by the Friends of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, to continuously monitor, record and log the brightness of its night skies. Staff and volunteer astronomers educate Preserve visitors, the public and the local community about the wonders found in truly dark skies and the importance of keeping them dark, offering frequent astronomy programs and outreach events.

You can help the Preserve keep its valuable designation by donating to the **Dark Skies Fund** on our website at [kissimleeprairiefriends.org](http://kissimleeprairiefriends.org).

## How can you help?

DONATE to Dark Skies Fund  
[KissimmeePrairieFriends.org](http://KissimmeePrairieFriends.org)

- Use energy efficient lighting with light shields to direct light where you need it.
- Shut off lights after dark when no longer needed.
- Educate each other on the importance of preserving the beauty and health benefits of dark skies.

I leave you with quotes from the book, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. (For those of you who have not read it, I encourage you to do so):

*“All men have stars,” he answered, “but they are not the same things for different people. For some, who are travellers, the stars are guides. For others they are no more than little lights in the sky. For others, who are scholars, they are problems. For my businessman they are wealth. But all these stars are silent. You—you alone—will have the stars as no one else has them—”*

*“It will be as if, in place of the stars, I had given you a great number of little bells that knew how to laugh”*

Kissimmee Prairie Preserve is a place where we hope to hear the little bells of bright laughter forever and ever!

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