



Beaver Log

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Protecting the Night

Imagine a world without stars. No reciting “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” with your children. No wishing upon a star. No searching the skies for constellations. While this scenario may be extreme, views of the night sky are not what they could be: two-thirds of the American population can’t see the Milky Way from their homes. Why? Because poorly directed lighting impacts natural lightscapes. Fortunately all of us, including the National Park Service, can help undo this damage and restore our view of the stars.

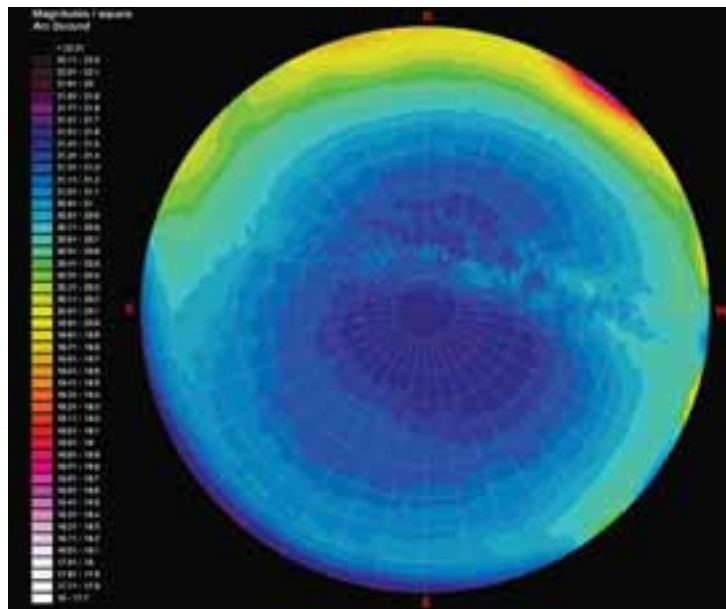
In pristine conditions, we can see more than 10,000 stars. This number starts to decline quickly as population increases. In suburban areas, 1,500–3,000 stars might be visible; in the city, maybe only 500. In dense suburbs or urban areas, we can no longer identify the Milky Way. In these areas, light pollution from outdoor lights aimed upward or sideways increases the brightness of the night sky and decreases the contrast between stars and the sky. This light pollution impacts the natural world as well: nocturnal animals depend on darkness to hunt, hide, navigate, and reproduce, and unnatural light disrupts the growth cycle of plants and trees near streetlights.

Unless you’ve seen a truly dark night sky, you don’t know what you’re missing. A sky awash with thousands of brilliant points of light won’t soon be forgotten. That’s where national parks come in. The skies over many national parks offer views of the stars unobstructed by light pollution. With some of the darkest skies in the densely populated Northeast, Acadia National Park provides a view you may not see at home. To protect this extraordinary yet often overlooked resource, Acadia National Park, Friends of Acadia, and the Island Astronomy Institute launched the Night Sky Initiative this year. Through work with local organizations, businesses, and schools, the initiative strives to measure, promote, and protect the night sky at Acadia for you to experience and enjoy. The project will identify and promote simple techniques, such as shielding light fixtures, that not only direct light to just where it is needed, but also improve the quality of light, save energy, and increase safety.

With a little effort on our part, we can prevent light pollution. Future generations deserve a chance to gaze upon the same stars seen by Maine’s Wabanaki peoples, European explorers, and early settlers. Why? Dr. Brian Green of Columbia University provides the answer: “...a clear night sky and a little instruction allow anyone to soar in mind and imagination to the farthest reaches of an enormous universe in which we are but a speck. And there is nothing more exhilarating and humbling than that.”



The United States is easily identified at night from space.



Night sky quality measurements taken atop Cadillac Mountain show the most light coming from the northwest (counterintuitively shown in the upper right).

Simple Ways to Enjoy and Protect Natural Darkness

- Take a hike on a carriage road under the full moon.
- Attend a star-gazing program with a park ranger or local science center (see pages 4–5 for “Stars Over Sand Beach”).
- Find a comfortable dark spot away from the lights of town and look around. Allow your eyes 20 minutes to adjust; you may be surprised how well you can see. Do objects appear farther? Do sounds seem louder?
- Look for nocturnal animals that live their “days” at night, such as owls, bats, or fireflies.
- Visit www2.nature.nps.gov/air/lightscapes/index.cfm to learn more about natural lightscapes and things you can do to prevent light pollution at home.

Road Trips

Explore history and culture in two more National Park Service sites in Maine.

Saint Croix Island International Historic Site commemorates one of the earliest European settlements in North America. On the mainland, exhibits and bronze figures tell the story of the French colonists and Native Americans who once frequented this site. Restrooms and a picnic area are also available. Visits to the island are not encouraged due to its fragile nature. The site is located on Route 1, eight miles south of Calais, Maine. www.nps.gov/sacr

The culture of Maine Acadians, descendants of early French settlers, is alive and well in the St. John Valley of northern Maine. The National Park Service supports the Maine Acadian Heritage Council, an association of historical societies, cultural clubs, towns, and museums working together to preserve Acadian culture. These organizations operate a number of different cultural attractions. The St. John Valley is approximately five hours north of Bar Harbor. www.nps.gov/maac



A family enjoys the trailside exhibits at Saint Croix Island International Historic Site.


Pages 2-3 Happenings

i Find out what’s going on this month. See pages 2-3 for details about park closures, fee information, and facilities and services that will help you plan your trip. Learn more about activities for kids and important tips to help you have a safe visit.

Pages 4-6 Programs

Whether you are feeling adventurous and want to explore the park on foot or would rather sit back and relax while you learn, you can find a ranger-led program to suit your interests. Park rangers offer walks, talks, hikes, boat tours, amphitheater programs, and more. Join us on a program today!

Page 8 Tips

 Wondering what’s the best time to explore the intertidal zone or watch sunset from Cadillac Mountain? Looking for ideas to help protect the park’s plants and animals as you explore? Check out the tide chart, sunrise/sunset times, and tidepooling tips on page 8.

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