

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UBarU Camp and Retreat Center Named International Dark Sky Park

TUCSON, AZ (2 November 2015) – The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) has named the UBarU Camp and Retreat Center in Texas an International Dark Sky Park.

“The designation of UBarU is another great stride forward in the protection of dark skies in the Texas Hill County,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend. “The new Dark Sky Park also demonstrates a new model for night sky protection by working with a private foundation to achieve a common goal.”

UBarU is a 57.5-hectare (142-acre) property in southwest Gillespie County, Texas, owned and operated by the Unitarian Universalist Friends Retreat Foundation. The Foundation is a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations of Texas and beyond, and received the land in 2001 from a resident Quaker community with the request that the Foundation care for the land as they had done for the benefit of the community and the Earth. Most of the land is subject to a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department wildlife management plan.

UBarU is situated in a part of the Hill Country that largely shields it from the light domes of Interstate 35-corridor cities from Austin to San Antonio. The designation of the UBarU is part of a broader movement in the Hill Country to protect night skies and includes the certification of a Dark Sky Community in Dripping Springs, a Dark Sky Park at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, and improvements to lighting ordinances in cities such as Fredericksburg.

“Creating a Dark Sky Park on UU land is consistent with the Seventh UU Principle – respect for the interdependent web of all existence – and Unitarian values in general,” explained Roy Ellzey of the Foundation. “Attention to proper lighting and natural conditions at night dovetails well with other environmental efforts at UBarU such as using solar power, rainwater collection, recycling and habitat restoration.”

As part of the IDA certification process, outdoor lighting at UBarU was improved and its impact on the night skies above the property reduced. Also, UBarU staff have delivered astronomy-themed programming both to registered meeting attendees at UBarU as well as to visitors from the public, including at recent Astronomy Weekend and Perseid meteor viewing events.

UBarU has established a relationship with Schreiner University in nearby Kerrville. The University will begin involving UBarU in its astronomy outreach efforts and incorporate activities at the camp and retreat center into its instruction. UBarU has also reached out to the city of Kerrville itself, consulting with officials on the pending upgrade of the city’s municipally owned street lighting to LED. Kerrville officials are now aware of good lighting practices and have selected a fully-shielded, white LED street lighting system that emits less harmful blue light than originally planned.

About the IDA Dark Sky Places Program

IDA established the International Dark Sky Places conservation program in 2001 to recognize excellent stewardship of the night sky. Designations are based on stringent outdoor lighting standards and innovative community outreach. Since the program began, 11 Communities, 30 Parks, nine Reserves and one Sanctuary have received International Dark Sky designations. For more information about the International Dark Sky Places Program, visit <http://darksky.org/idsp>.

About IDA

The International Dark Sky Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, advocates for the protection of the nighttime environment and dark night skies by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and promoting environmentally responsible outdoor lighting. More information about IDA and its mission may be found at <http://www.darksky.org>.

About UBarU

UBarU Camp and Retreat Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit facility located near Mountain Home, Texas and some 18 miles west of Kerrville, Texas. It resides on privately-owned land, but is widely available to the public on a fee-per-use basis, beginning at rates similar to those at state and national parks. Overnight accommodations range from tent camping, to bunk-house sleeping, to private rooms or cottages, with staff-prepared meals available to groups by request. All access is by reservation, with details at www.ubaru.org.

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