

## **IDA Designates First U.S. International Dark Sky Sanctuary In New Mexico**

TUCSON, Ariz. (14 January 2016) – The International Dark-Sky Association is pleased to announce the designation of the Cosmic Campground as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary. It is the first such designation in the U.S., and the first IDA International Dark Sky Place designation of a U.S. Forest Service location.

“We are very excited to announce the inaugural designation of an IDA Dark Sky Place on Forest Service land, and hope to strengthen our ties with this important public land management agency,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend.

International Dark Sky Sanctuaries are public or private lands possessing an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights. Their dark nighttime conditions are specifically protected for their scientific, natural, educational or cultural value, and are often located in some of the most remote and undeveloped parts of the world. Sanctuary designations are made by IDA to increase awareness of these fragile sites and promote their long-term conservation.

The new International Dark Sky Sanctuary is a 3.5 acre (1.42 hectare) site in the Gila National Forest of western New Mexico, U.S. Located between the Gila Wilderness and the Blue Range Primitive Area, the Cosmic Campground is situated in an exceptionally dark part of the lower 48 U.S. states. It features a basic infrastructure to support campers and offers a 360-degree, unobstructed view night sky.

The nearest significant source of electric light to the site is more than 40 miles (65 km) away and across the border of neighboring Arizona. Coupled with ready accessibility by road and typically clear, dry weather conditions at moderate altitude, the Campground could become a new mecca for amateur astronomers and casual stargazers seeking a one-of-a-kind experience under the stars.

“The Cosmic Campground, a peaceful, natural night sky place is ideal as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary in the Gila National Forest of New Mexico, the United States, and the Earth,” explained Ann Grauer of Friends of the Cosmic Campground. “We are honored to help preserve and protect this small, dark place for present and future generations to connect with their inherent fascination and attraction to our night sky.”

There is no permanent, artificial lighting installed at the Cosmic Campground, and the Forest Service’s plans do not call for any such lighting in the future. Rather, the Campground is to be maintained in a state that allows visitors to experience nighttime conditions close to those before the introduction of electric lighting in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, visitors can access modern conveniences, such as wi-fi network connectivity via a cell tower located 15 miles to the south of the Cosmic Campground.

Officials see the potential for the Cosmic Campground’s new IDA status to yield a positive economic benefit for western New Mexico. Tourists who come for the extremely remote character of the nearby Gila Wilderness may well find that the Campground extends the sense of the area’s primitive quality past sunset.

## Image



The Milky Way sets over the Cosmic Campground. (Credit: David Thornburg)  
[bit.ly/1PhSJSI](http://bit.ly/1PhSJSI)

### **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, 12 Communities, 30 Parks, 10 Reserves, two Sanctuaries, and three Dark Sky Friendly Developments of Distinction 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>.

### **Media Inquiries**

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