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Ketchum Earns “Dark Sky Community” Designation

KETCHUM, IDAHO – The City of Ketchum has officially been designated as an “International Dark Sky Community” by the international organization dedicated to reducing light pollution and preserving night skies.

The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) announced its decision to certify Ketchum Tuesday, capping several years of efforts by city leaders, dark-sky advocates, business leaders and citizens to reduce the impact urban light can have on Ketchum’s night sky.

Ketchum is the first Idaho city to earn the designation and joins the Craters of the Moon as the only Idaho places recognized by IDA for its amazing window to the universe.

“This is terrific news for the city, its residents and visitors who enjoy and value the unique view we have to the stars, planets and deep space,” said Mayor Nina Jonas. “This is also a testament to the work of so many who have devoted time and energy to reducing light pollution across our city and neighborhoods so that we can enjoy the truly terrific views we have of the night sky.”

Research shows that 80 percent of people in North America live in places where urban light pollution dilutes the night sky. To achieve dark sky community status, the city council adopted ordinances to manage holiday lighting or require that street and building lighting be shielded to direct light to the ground.

For the city to maintain its status it must continue to protect the night sky through educational and awareness materials, dark sky events and other exhibits and programs.

A nonprofit based on Tucson, Arizona, IDA advocates globally to protect the nighttime environment through education and working with policy makers about night sky conservation and promoting responsible outdoor lighting. The group established the International Dark Sky Places Program in 2001 to recognize sites where local leaders practice outstanding stewardship of the night sky.

Ketchum is now one of 11 International Dark Sky Communities in the United States. In its review, IDA considered whether the city’s lighting ordinances met IDA criteria, the level of public education and outreach on the importance of dark skies and ability to demonstrate success in controlling light pollution.

“We are so pleased with today’s designation of Ketchum as Idaho’s first Dark Sky Community,” said IDA Executive Director J. Scott Feierabend. “Not only is Ketchum’s achievement a first for the Gem State, but it represents important first steps toward the active conservation of dark skies over one of the last remaining large regions of a natural nighttime darkness in the continental United States.”

The city is also included in the proposal to establish the Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve, which is still under consideration by IDA. The reserve would encompass more than 1,400 square miles, include Ketchum, Sun Valley and Stanley and be the first of its kind in the United States.

Dr. Stephen Pauley, who has advocated and encouraged local leaders to adopt ordinances limiting light pollution, said Ketchum and its residents should be proud of the designation.

“The city deserves to be designated a dark sky community. Citizens and city leaders, planners and business owners all had a hand in achieving this goal and preserving our dark skies,” said Dr. Pauley. “We should all feel good about this and take a moment to think about the benefit this leaves for generations to follow.”

Media inquiries for the International Dark Sky Association should be made to Dr. John Barentine at john@darksky.org or at (520) 347-6363. For more information about IDA, visit its website at: <http://www.darksky.org>