

Staunton River State Park

Dark Sky Park Annual Report – 2018

Staunton River State Park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park in June 2015, and our popularity and recognition as a premier east coast location to view the night sky has continued to grow. We have had extremely effective programming throughout the year, and have continued to work with locality leaders in promoting the preservation of our dark sky throughout the community.

Highlights from 2018 are as follows:

2018 Programming

Staunton River State Park has continued to host dark sky and astronomy related programming throughout the year, and again increased the number of programs offered. While difficult to track, we have noticed an increase in park visitation from guests coming just to view the night sky. This increase includes overnight (cabin and camping) as well as day-use visitation. Highlights of the last year are listed below:

- Staunton River Star Party – October 16-22, 2017 (event occurred after submittal of the 2017 annual report)
 - Our flagship event was again well-attended, with over 200 astronomers enjoying beautiful views of the night sky for the whole week. The Halifax County Tourism Dept. again helped us greatly by promoting this event, which saw nearly 150 guests come out for the Public Observation Night even though the sky was mostly cloudy. This event continues to grow each year.
- Staunton River Star Party – March 14-18
 - Our smaller event held each spring drew record numbers even with the coldest weather we had yet to experience. Monday, March 12 brought us 3” of snow right before the event, but most had melted before the first telescope hit the field on Wednesday, however the cold temperatures persisted. Over 100 astronomers enjoyed the 4-day event, which is our largest spring-time crowd yet.
- Ranger-led Observing Sessions
 - Monthly observing sessions were held throughout 2018, as well as during meteor showers, Jupiter and Saturn at opposition, and the full moon on January 2. These programs provide us an excellent opportunity to teach guests about the night sky, as well as ways they can help protect the night sky. Our observing sessions throughout the summer were our best attended,

with 4 programs scheduled June – August, averaging 119 guests. Several programs throughout the summer were cancelled due to weather.

- **Loaner Telescopes**
 - Telescopes donated by the Chapel Hill Astronomical Observational Society (CHAOS) continue to be very popular with our guests. We have had telescopes rented over every weekend of 2018 to date, and all 5 loaner scopes have been out most weekends over the summer. We have begun taking advanced reservations for telescopes since they have become so popular.

Sky Quality

Volunteers from the CHAOS continue to record sky quality measurements from permanent locations throughout the park. The table below lists the results of 2018 readings, as well as compared to the 2017 readings.

Average SQM Readings - 2018		
	Readings	
Site	March 14	July 14
1	21.48	21.20
2	21.51	21.30
3	21.49	21.37
4	21.53	21.41
5	21.52	21.36
6	21.48	21.41
7	21.48	21.40
8	21.52	21.39
9	21.49	21.47
10	21.46	21.27
11	21.44	21.42
Park Average	21.49	21.36
2017 Averages	21.36	21.17

Lighting

Funding has recently been allocated to convert 2 of the 4 remaining non-compliant fixtures at the Dan River Boat Ramp to dark-sky compliant fixtures, and we will be purchasing new fixtures in late October 2018 for the refurbishment. Since this 24-hour facility does not have electricity, we rely on solar pole-mounted fixtures for area lighting, and the cost of converting these light fixtures is significant. We have been taking a piece-meal approach to the conversions to lighten the financial burden. If funding is again received for the next

budget cycle, we will replace the last 2 non-compliant fixtures providing us 100% compliance with our Lightscape Management Plan in 2019.

Community and Media Relations

- Park staff continue to work closely with Halifax County, town of Halifax, and town of South Boston leaders to promote our events, county tourism efforts, and promotion of our dark sky. Halifax County planners have drafted legislation similar to the dark sky lighting requirement ordinance in the town of Halifax. Due to personnel changes in the County Administrator's office, this has not come before the Board of Supervisors yet but will in the near future. Park staff will work with county leaders on this proposed ordinance that was pushed to the forefront due to several presentations from park staff.
- Park Manager Adam Layman, Director of State Parks Craig Seaver, and Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation Clyde Cristman had an information session and presented educational materials to Virginia House of Delegates 19th District Delegate Terry Austin. Delegate Austin is a proponent of dark sky preservation as well a supporter of more Virginia State Parks obtaining Dark Sky Park certification.