



# Create Your Own State Park Dark Skies

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No camping trip to your state park would be complete without stargazing after dark. Maryland State Parks offer some of the best views of the night sky across the state. Yet, the stars in the sky are not always visible, especially in urban areas with lots of outside lights. This is due to light pollution, as man-made lights that aren't properly shielded project light upwards into the atmosphere. By minimizing light pollution at your own state park, you can help to preserve the night sky to be enjoyed by all who visit.

## Did You Know?

- Light pollution is when human-made lights have a negative effect on the natural environment. Some impacts of light pollution include disrupting animal's sleep patterns and blocking out the night sky.
- With a clear sky and minimal pollution, as many as 1,500 stars may be visible to the naked eye.
- Stars and constellations have been used throughout human history to navigate by.
- The closest star to earth, besides the sun, is Proxima Centauri, which is approximately 40,208,000,000,000 kilometers or 25 Trillion miles away.

## Activities

- Light Pollution Solution-** First, go outside with the lights at your state park turned on and take a look at the sky? What stars can you see? Can you even see any/many? Then turn off all the lights in your state park and take a look again. Do you see more stars without the lights?
- Constellation Observation-** Since the dawn of time, humans have gazed up at the stars and been inspired by what they saw. By drawing lines between stars, images, known as constellations, are created. Some well known constellations include the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, and Orion the Hunter, which you can view here: <https://stardate.org/nightsky/constellations> Can you see any constellations from your state park?
- Constellation Creation-** Now try making your own constellations. Connect the dots between any stars of your choosing and draw an image for it.
- Make Your State Park More Dark Sky Friendly-** While the problem of light pollution seems overwhelming, as we also need lights to help us see at night, there are many simple steps you can take to help keep the night sky visible in your State Park, like turning off unnecessary lights. The best place to start your research is the website of the International Dark Sky Association, a non-profit organization that promotes the preservation of the dark skies by educating people about light pollution and designating standards for exterior light fixtures that minimize pollution. Put together a Dark Skies plan for your State Park!

## Additional Resources:

- International Dark Sky Association: <https://www.darksky.org/>
- Light Pollution Definition: <https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/>
- The Nearest Star to Earth: [https://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/features/cosmic/nearest\\_star\\_info.html](https://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/features/cosmic/nearest_star_info.html)



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