

# DARK SKY

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## KERN COUNTY APPROVES DARK SKY ORDINANCE

Kern River Valley Revitalization's purpose in hosting this page is to facilitate understanding and discussion regarding preservation of the Kern River Valley's "DARK SKY." Why is the Kern River Valley's dark sky important?

- The night skies surrounding the Kern River Valley are some of the darkest and clearest in California. Want to know why the Dark Sky is such a passionate issue for some? Attend a nearby Star Party!

NightWise.org explains why it matters: Errant and excessive outdoor lighting detracts from the night. Often dubbed light pollution, this wayward light is commonly seen as glare, spillover (including light trespass), and sky glow. By implementing better lighting practices:

- you save money and energy;
  - you improve safety for motorists and pedestrians;
  - you increase security and the sense of well-being;
  - you benefit animal habitats;
  - you preserve the starry night;
  - you improve the quality of life;
  - you lessen greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.
- Correcting the impact of light pollution is often just a matter of awareness. You can help prevent outdoor lighting from impinging on the night sky by aiming lights downward; by turning lights off when not in use; by covering exposed light sources with full cut-off shields; by not over-lighting; and by installing sky-friendly fixtures.

The North American Nebula NGC7000 from the Kern River Valley. Rick Crockett photo.

The Kern River Valley's incredible nighttime sky is highly valued by a majority of its residents and visitors for many years. Bakersfield Californian 7-11-06: Night skies attract stargazers to eastern Kern Valley Kern Valley Sun 6-18-08: Dark Skies Ordinance for KRV under Consideration Kern River Courier Dark Skies articles 8-8-08 It has been mentioned in every major visioning and planning effort of late. A Vision for the Kern River Valley:

Principles for Economic and Ecological Sustainability

(Cal Poly Pomona June 2000, page 19) "As an amateur astronomer, I like that I can still see the stars at night, without the interference from city, street, and sign lights." - Valley resident

- "Light pollution is already an issue in the Kern River Valley, but it has the potential to affect two of the Valley's more impressive attributes: the abundant wildlife and the ability to view stars."
- "Additionally, the ability to view the stars at night is one of the Valley's coveted treasures."
- Bower, Joe. 2000. The Dark Side of Light. Audubon. March-April: pp. 92-97, states that as "few as one in 10 Americans live in areas where they can see the 2,500 or so stars that should be visible under normal nighttime conditions."
- "Residents and visitors alike enjoy this valued quality of the Kern River Valley." Kern COG Blueprint KRV Summary Report (April 11, 2007, page 4) "Visions & Values: Clear view of the stars and dark skies at night" Draft Kern River Valley Specific Plan (underway) "Light pollution is the adverse effect of man-made light and includes sky glow, glare, light trespass, and light clutter. In the Kern River Valley, light and glare pollution affect properties and structures, as well as habitat and wildlife communities." KRVR's comment to the KRV Specific Plan regarding the Dark Sky issue.

Tuesday afternoon, July 29th, 3 Kern River Valley citizens spoke before Kern County's Board of Supervisors in reference to an item regarding Dark Sky ordinances for the County's rural areas. Originally, that item was on the "Consent Calendar" meaning it would have been approved as a RECEIVE AND FILE item with a large batch of other items. Staff would have made no special presentation. The public would have had no opportunity to speak and the Supervisors would not have discussed it and given their staff further direction as to how to proceed. Nothing more would have happened. 2pm 7-29-08 Item #13) Response to Board of Supervisors Referral from May, 2006, Related to Addressing Development Project Dark Sky Issues in Rural Communities a 3 page letter from Ted James, Kern County

Planning Director.

Supervisors Jon McQuiston, Don Maben, Chairman Michael J. Rubio, Ray Watson & Mike Maggard. By asking that public comment be allowed, KRV residents Richard Rowe, Rick Crockett and Ron Hyatt were able to speak, following a short presentation by Planning Director Ted James. Many others wrote letters, sent e-mails or contacted their Supervisor on this issue as well.

Following all that, our Board of Supervisors discussed the Dark Sky issue, taking the following action unanimously: Read the Minutes or view Video of the 3 hour 48 minute board meeting held at 2pm Tuesday 7-29-08 in Bakersfield. To read a summary what each of the 3 public citizens said along with the discussion among the Supervisors on this item, click on: Summary of Testimony & Discussion on Dark Sky Item #13

We are working on a transcript of that meeting, so you will be able to see what each Supervisor said and Planning Director Ted James's answers to their questions. Once we've completed it, we will post it here. Reporting on that Board action: Bakersfield Californian 8-2-08: Kern considers 'dark sky' law  
Night lights in the Wofford Heights area are seen at dusk from the Camp 9 area Thursday evening.  
The reflection is from the top of a vehicle and Isabella Lake is in the center. Casey Christie photo. In the near future, the Kern County Planning Department will come out with a schedule for the Dark Sky ordinance, including public workshops, which will be posted here.

Both KRVR and Frazier Park's Mountain Community Town Council have offered to host Public Forums on the Dark Sky issue. Dark Sky Ordinances §142.0740 (a) Outdoor lighting shall minimize impacts from light pollution including light trespass, glare, and urban sky glow to preserve enjoyment of the night sky and minimize conflict caused by unnecessary illumination. Regulation of outdoor lighting is also intended to conserve electrical energy. Outdoor lighting is regulated by the State of California's Building Energy Efficient Standards of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations, parts 1 and 6 [Title 24]. No light fixtures shall exceed the light emission requirements of Section 142.0740 unless the light emission requirements of Section 142.0740 do not comply with Title 24's energy efficient standards. SOURCE Fortunately, Kern County doesn't have to "Reinvent the Wheel" as many other counties & cities have adopted Dark Sky ordinances. Kern County can learn from their experience - pro & con. Kern County Planning Director Ted James gave the Board of Supervisors this ordinance & it was discussed at the 7-29-08 Board of Supervisors Meeting, so it seems to be the most favored model. San Bernardino County, Regulations for Glare, Outdoor Lighting & Night Sky Protection KRV resident Rick Crockett mentioned his involvement in this groundbreaking ordinance while being heard at the 7-29-08 Board of Supervisors Meeting San Diego County Light Pollution Ordinance 3 other California counties:

- Butte County Ordinance 24-241 - Outdoor lighting in residential areas
  - El Dorado County Outdoor Lighting Code
  - Riverside County, Ordinance Regulating Light Pollution
  - San Benito County Ordinance to Regulate Outdoor Lighting
- For more examples of other Dark Sky ordinances:  
Directory of Lighting Ordinances Outdoor Lighting Regulations in California  
To be fair & balanced: Point: Less regulation and more education (4-24-07)

Counterpoint: Why we need regulation and education (8-4-08) Background on the Dark Sky issue: The best source of information is the

International Dark-Sky Association Other helpful websites:

- Dark Sky Initiative
- Skykeepers
- NightWise.org
- Nightwise.org's Examples of Good & Bad nighttime lighting
- The British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark (starry, natural) Skies Articles & more helpful to understanding the Dark Sky issue:
  - It's All About the Lighting: City Lights Are Obscuring Our Starry Nights by Robert Lee Hotz (Wall Street Journal 7-25-08, page A-10)
  - Dark Sky Lighting: Simple but Effective by Peter Strasser, International Dark-Sky Association (LandscapeOnline.com April 2008)
  - Letter to the Environmental Protection Agency (1-4-08) from International Dark-Sky Association Board of Directors President Bob Gent requesting that it "consider the environmental, safety, and health effects of light pollution as an EPA recognized pollutant."
  - Some say the best "light pollution" story ever published by a popular magazine: The Dark Side: Making war on light pollution by David Owen (The New Yorker magazine, 8-20-2007)
  - National Geographic November 2008: Light Pollution: Our Vanishing Night Reports & Studies on the effects of light pollution When hearing about the possibility of a Dark Sky Ordinance, one Kern River Valley resident remarked: "Oh NO! I'll have to replace the motion sensor floodlight next to my front door!" Truth is, almost certainly that light would qualify as a "good light" anyhow. And it isn't certain how "retroactivity" will be included in the Kern County Dark Sky ordinance, if at all. For those who have questions, check out these Dark Sky Frequently Asked Questions & Answers. Check KRVR.org's Preserving the

KRV's Dark Sky Forum for new postings from time to time. If you'd like to be sent announcements on this subject, click on DARK SKY ACTION e-mail list or send your name, location & e-mail address (phone too) to [eworinkrv@mchsi.com](mailto:eworinkrv@mchsi.com). To experience Kern County's Dark Sky:

- Kern River Valley Astronomy Club Star Party Next one: Aug 26th at Tillie Creek in Wofford Heights. Starts at dusk. There will be a slide show followed by observing. Members will be bringing their telescopes for viewing. If you have a telescope and would like to bring it, please do.
- China Lake Astronomical Society
- Greater Tehachapi Astronomy Club
- Kern Astronomical Society