

Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve

“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see, wonder about what makes the universe exist” - Dr. Stephen Hawking

What is a Dark Sky Reserve?

A Dark Sky Reserve is an accreditation awarded to a locale by the International Dark Sky Association (IDSA) acknowledging exceptional night sky brilliance and community commitment to minimizing artificial light pollution to protect this unique quality. Dark Sky Reserve accreditation is achieved through a formal application and approval process with IDSA. Reserves generally consist of a dark “core” zone surrounded by a more populated periphery (or buffer zone). The core often involves protected lands preserved for scientific, natural, educational, cultural, heritage protection and public enjoyment. Though there is no specific size requirement, the core and surrounding buffer area must be large enough to afford meaningful public access and outreach. The Reserve also acts as a dark sky resource for surrounding communities and visitors wishing to enjoy night skies and their benefits.

Why Central Idaho?

Across the county and the world, the ability to experience quality night sky conditions is rapidly diminishing. Central Idaho remains one of the best areas in the U.S. to view starry skies largely because of proactive efforts communities and others have already undertaken to protect our night skies. At present, there are only 12 Dark Sky Reserves in the world, and none in the United States. This area provides a particularly promising base for Dark Sky Reserve given current conditions, existing ordinances and existing wilderness areas. A Reserve would provide

additional economic and marketing opportunities to the surrounding communities of Challis, Ketchum, Smiley Creek, Stanley, and Sun Valley.

Who is involved?

Creating a Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve would be a collective commitment by local communities, businesses, private landowners, and public land managers to protect and promote the dark sky experience. Hopefully, by 2017 a collaborative application could be finalized and submitted to the Internal Dark Sky Association on behalf of the communities that surround the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) including Blaine and Custer Counties, Ketchum, Stanley, Sun Valley and perhaps others. As public land managers of the SNRA, the Forest Service would be a partner in the effort. NGO groups such as the Idaho Conservation League and the Sawtooth Society are also actively engaged.

The application would include a plan for preserving and enhancing our night sky resource by building educational opportunities, educating residents and visitors about and/or improving existing dark sky ordinances, and working to expand voluntary pursuit of night-sky friendly lighting across the Reserve by developing an incentive program for improvements to outdoor lighting.



What areas would be included in the reserve?

As initially proposed, the Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve (indicated in pink below) would encompass portions of Blaine and Custer Counties, including the communities of Ketchum, Smiley Creek, Stanley, and Sun Valley, as well as the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. (The Reserve area could later be expanded if appropriate.) The proposed core zones (indicated in orange below) would exclude private land, would overlap both Blaine and Custer Counties, portions of the White Cloud and Sawtooth Wilderness and would provide access to those wishing to experience pristine night skies in a beautiful, uncluttered setting.

