

Offered Title: The Night Sky, an Endangered Species

Last week I spoke of the fictional planet Trantor, located near the galaxy's center in the 12th millennium. That planet was completely developed and lit up all the time. No night sky.

Having lived in Houston for 30 years or so I felt the lack of this precious resource. Even 30 miles from downtown our neighborhood was plagued by severe light pollution. That's because light tends to follow people. We like to, think we need to light up our outdoor spaces. It looks good, feels safe too. So, at 30 miles from the city we were bathed in suburban glow. Our night sky was a pale gray.

Fast forward and now we live in Canyon Lake, Hill Country skies are still reasonably dark. For now. Just like the thousands before us, we moved here because it's wonderful. Just like the thousands before us we brought the need for outdoor lighting. As our numbers grow so does the infrastructure to manage us, to support our needs. That infrastructure includes stuff like restaurants, pubs, service stations, entertainment venues, and the roadways that get us to them. It all needs light for the night, to look good, feel safe.

But we don't have to be Houston, and fortunately it seems there is a desire among many people in the Hill Country to preserve our night sky resource. We are in good company; so far three Hill Country communities have been designated 'Dark Sky Communities' by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). They are: Wimberly/Woodcreek, Horseshoe Bay, and Dripping Springs. In 2008 Bulverde adopted an ordinance specifying acceptable outdoor lighting and it helps. Pedernales Electric Coop has a night sky resolution. This is encouraging.

Another encouraging development: At their recent board of directors meeting, New Braunfels Utilities (NBU) passed a resolution in support of maintaining dark skies in their service area. Members from the Hill Country Alliance and New Braunfels Astronomy Club were present in a show of support for this resolution. NBU already has dark sky friendly specifications in place and plans to review them to keep current.

Where do we go from here? Each step is a step toward preserving a valuable natural resource. Valuable not in how it can be exploited for material use, but valuable for its ability to excite, sooth, inspire, mystify...you name it! A good night sky Rocks! Each of us can help by reducing our own light pollution. Take inventory of your outdoor lighting and make sure it's not sending light where it is not needed. Make especially sure your lighting doesn't send light upward, unless that light is completely blocked by whatever it's lighting.

Encourage your local government to adopt dark sky resolutions.

Don't know where to start? Contact the Hill Country Alliance: hillcountryalliance.org 512.263.9147

What's in the Sky?

09/14-09/17; Dusk; South: Watch a growing Moon move away from Jupiter and closer to Saturn, sliding through Scorpius and into Sagittarius.