



Title: DARK SKY FRIENDLY POLICY		
Subject: GENERAL OPERATIONS	Page: 1 of 5	Policy Number: 03.60.00
Category: DISTRICTWIDE POLICY	Approval Date: 10/29/2020	Last Revised Date:

POLICY STATEMENT:

The night sky is truly inspiring. From the thousands of stars visible on a dark night, to the arc of nebulous light rising across the Milky Way. However, over the past 100 years, our skies have become more difficult to view as they have become obscured by human-produced light pollution. Unless we act now, there is the potential for future generations to grow up never experiencing the wonder and beauty of a truly dark night sky.

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (the “District”), with nearly 70,000 acres, is one of the oldest and largest forest preserve districts in the United States. It receives an estimated 62 million visits each year, providing an escape into a world teeming with wildlife and rich with outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities. Within its boundaries are rare habitats that offer plant and animal diversity on par with the rainforests of the world. The District is also an area in the north eastern region of Illinois that currently has some of the darkest skies.

The District is diligently working with partner organizations and other key stakeholders to ensure that our special landscapes and skies are there for future generations to enjoy. The District’s “Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan” calls on the District to become a Dark Sky Friendly institution. The District is also looking to pursue international recognition for the quality of the District’s night skies.

PURPOSE:

Within this document, the District has presented a policy on reducing light pollution and calls for the District to be more ambitious in providing public educational and outreach activities to the public, in support of this Dark Sky Friendly policy. The rules and guidelines established in this policy are designed to align with the International Dark Sky Associations urban dark sky place certification criteria and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Lighting Ordinance (Section 1-16-4).

AFFECTED AREAS:

This policy applies to all persons entering, visiting or using resources at any District location. The District reserves the right to change, modify or amend this policy at any time as it deems appropriate.

DEFINITIONS:

Dark Sky: The Dark Sky denotes a place where the darkness of the night sky is reasonably free of interference from artificial light to reduce light pollution. Dark Sky lighting is lighting provided only where it is needed, while reducing unnecessary scattered light and glare. Dark Sky focuses on only using as much light as is needed and when it is needed.

International Dark-Sky Association (IDA): The IDA is an organization working to decrease light pollution and skyglow in the night-time environment as well as promote areas for safe stargazing.

Light Pollution: Light pollution is artificial light that shines where it is neither wanted nor needed. Not only does light pollution have an impact on people's enjoyment of the night sky, it has also been shown to have an impact on quality of life, ecology, the environment, as well as wasting energy.



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Urban Night Sky Place (UNSP): An UNSP is a municipal park, open space, observing site, or other similar property near or surrounded by large urban environs whose planning and design actively promote an authentic nighttime experience in the midst of significant artificial light. By virtue of their characteristics, these sites do not qualify for designation within any other International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) category. However, they are worthy of recognition for their efforts to educate the public on the benefits of proper outdoor lighting that ensures public safety while minimizing potential harm to the natural nighttime environment.

PROCEDURE/PROCESS:

1) **Important Facts:** The District, with the support of the [Adler Planetarium](#), believe that light pollution should be taken seriously in planning and public policy for several mission and programming related purposes, including some of the following reasons:

- A [2019 Report](#) that Chicago is the most dangerous place in America for birds due to light pollution.
- A [2020 Report](#) that shows how artificial light pollution here on Earth poses more of a threat to ground-based astronomy than even the next generation of commercial satellite constellations.
- A [2020 Report](#) that shows higher levels of outdoor light at night may link to breast cancer risks.
- A [2020 Report](#) that links artificial light at night with disrupting circadian rhythms and causing sleep disturbances.

2) **The Benefits of Implementing This Policy:** The District expects several benefits by implementing this dark sky friendly policy, including:

- **Energy:** Policies that promote dark skies are tied directly to reducing the consumption of energy by promoting appropriate and efficient outdoor lighting technologies. This policy will allow staff to control the types of outdoor lighting that may be installed on District property, but also determine appropriate lighting levels and warranting conditions for light (*whether lights may be installed in certain areas and/or operated during particular hours of day*).
- **Economics:** Implementing appropriate lighting will assist the District to meet targets for cost savings. Reducing lighting saves the District money and other operational resources that can be redirected to mission driven programming.
- **Ecology:** The District is home to rare and endangered ecosystems and related wildlife species. Choices made about outdoor lighting impact all species and are especially important for locations in or near the District’s sensitive habitats. Bad lighting practices have lethal consequences for wildlife, but the implementation of this policy can help restore healthy urban ecosystems.
- **Human Health and Wellness:** Humans evolved to the rhythms of the natural light-dark cycle of day and night. The spread of artificial lighting means most of us no longer experience truly dark nights.



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Research suggests that artificial light at night can negatively affect human health, increasing risks for obesity, depression, sleep disorders, diabetes, breast cancer and more.

- 3) **General Dark Sky Friendly Policy:** The District will develop a 5-Year Lighting Transition Plan by the end of 2021. Within this five-year period, the District will ensure that all of its indoor and outdoor lighting fixtures comply with the standards established in the IDA or UNSP lighting guidelines. The District will also work with external partners, such as the Adler Planetarium, on securing UNSP certification for sites that comply with UNSP guidelines, on an on-going basis and/or as appropriate. The District will also work with the larger Cook County government to cross-promote and establish similar policies and practices.
- 4) **General Access to District Locations:** The District is open every day of the year from sunrise to sunset. Visitors are requested to check with individual Nature Centers, Campgrounds, and other facilities for specific hours of operation.
- 5) **Public Access to Urban Night Sky Designated Locations:** The District will provide public access to all urban night sky designated locations, after sunset, on an approved upon calendar. The District will also host dozens of dark sky related events/activities throughout the year at Urban Night Sky Designated Locations after normal business hours. Most of these events are free and open to the public. Individuals or organizations desiring to use the District after normal hours for dark-sky-related activities will be requested to work directly with our Conservation & Experiential Programming Department, at least one month, but preferably earlier in advance of the date of the proposed event.
- 6) **Visitor Rules & Regulations:** In addition to the already established District [Rules & Regulations](#), visitors at any District Urban Night Sky Designated Location shall adhere to the following rules and regulations, after sunset (Normal Business Hours).
 - KEEP IT DARK (as much as you can).
 - Please Avoid White Light.
 - No flash photography please.
 - Keep headlights on low beam when arriving and exiting parking areas.
 - No headlights are to remain on through the duration of the night/your stay.
 - Visit the park before dark to allow time to get acquainted with surroundings and set up equipment.
 - Please be cautious and aware of your environment.
 - Be respectful of other visitors. Preserve the quality of their Dark Sky experience.
- 7) **Designated Locations:** The District’s Green Sustainability Committee shall identify District areas that do, and/or that should, align with the guidelines established in the IDA UNSP. When such an area has been confirmed, the committee will work the District’s established partners and District leadership in all necessary processes to submit such site for UNSP consideration and adoption. Final designation status must be recognized (i.e. receive and file and/or approved) by the District’s Board of Commissioners.
- 8) **Education & Public Outreach:** The District’s Conservation & Experiential Programming (CEP) Department connects diverse audiences to nature through a wide range of educational and outdoor recreation experiences, focused at six nature centers, three aquatic centers, five campgrounds and other sites throughout the Forest Preserves.



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CEP provides the Forest Preserves’ public programming: education and outdoor recreation events and programs, outdoor adventures, camping, water fun and swim lessons, and cultural and seasonal special events.

The Department is also responsible for community engagement and committed to developing relationships with citizens to energize them and connect them to nature. CEP works with program partners at the local level on programming, building relationships with groups to become long-term advocates, stewards and ambassadors of the Forest Preserves.

The CEP Department has committed to incorporating dark skies/natural darkness and the benefits of quality lighting into its programming and outreach curriculum. CEP & the District’s Communications Office will also provide related publications, flyers, press releases, media, social media, and/or other outreach efforts.

- 9) **Signage:** Once established, all District UNSP sites must erect and maintain a sign indicating the Urban Night Sky Place designation along a roadway entrance, along a footpath entrance if no roadway exists, or a visitor contact center. Once the sign is erected a picture documenting this sign must be taken and sent to IDA for records along with a description of its location. The District will also create relevant pictures/messaging on the District’s website and social media accounts.
- 10) **Reporting Process:** The District’s Green Sustainability Committee will submit an annual report to IDA, and the District’s Board of Commissioners, by September of each year detailing activities and progress towards fulfilling UNSP goals during the previous year.

RESPONSIBILITY:

Office of the General Superintendent: The Office of the General Superintendent shall: (1) manage the implementation of this policy; (2) coordinate efforts for all Urban Dark Sky related applications; (3) manage organizational partnerships; and (4) provide the Board of Commissioners and IDA officials a copy of related annual reports.

Communications Office: The Communications Office shall: (1) design all signage related materials in compliance with the UNSP criteria; (2) design all annual reports; and (3) communicate and market the District’s UNS actions where appropriate and beneficial.

Conservation & Experiential Programming Department: The Conservation & Experiential Programming Department shall: (1) ensure that all campground and nature center guests are familiar with the guidelines established in this policy; and (2) manage the education and public outreach programs associated with this policy.

Facilities & Fleet Maintenance Department: The Facilities & Fleet Maintenance Department shall: (1) manage all lighting upgrades to be aligned with UNSP guidelines; (2) oversee the development and implementation of the District’s Light Management Plan; (3) track and manage Light Inventory and related systems and processes; and, (4) support projects that advance the mission of this policy.



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TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) All impacted staff and contractors shall be trained on this policy.

COMMUNICATION PLAN:

- 1) This policy should be distributed to all relevant employees/contractors.
- 2) This policy should be added to the District shared drive, website, and intranet.

REFERENCES:

The Forest Preserves of Cook County
[Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan](#)

International Dark Sky Association
[Urban Night Sky Place Program Guidelines](#)

POLICY LEAD: [Anthony D. Tindall](#)
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Deputy General Superintendent

POLICY HISTORY:

Approved: 10/29/2020
Revised:

Revised:

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions concerning District policies, please contact:

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