

Cape Lookout National Seashore Certified as International Dark Sky Park



Cape Lookout Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters on a dark, clear night displaying the Milky Way above. (Photo credit: Crystal Coast Stargazers / Alex Gu)

Seashore is first Atlantic coastal Dark Sky Place in the National Park Service to receive this certification

Cape Lookout National Seashore

The National Park Service (NPS) and the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) proudly announce Cape Lookout National Seashore has been certified as an International Dark Sky Park. This certification recognizes the exceptional quality of the night skies of the park and the opportunities it provides for astronomy-based experiences for park visitors. Cape Lookout National Seashore is the first Atlantic coastal Dark Sky Place in the NPS to receive this certification.

"We are proud to include Cape Lookout National Seashore into our International Dark Sky Places Program. Not only do they serve as another exceptional National Park Service unit that understands and is fully committing to dark-sky efforts, but they also visibly demonstrate the balance between using light efficiently and coexisting with the natural, nocturnal environment with their lighting decisions. While the majority of the park's lighting is dark-sky friendly, the demonstration is most notable with the IDA Fixture Seal of Approval fixtures using adaptive controls at the Core Sound Museum and Heritage Center," said Ashley Wilson, Director of Conservation with the IDA.

"This certification is both an honor for our community and recognition of the unique values that make this park a national treasure," said Jeff West, superintendent of Cape Lookout National Seashore. "Embarking on this project helped me remember the wonder and amazement I felt gazing into the night sky as a child. The possibilities I imagined then are still there, dwarfing life's daily demands when put in perspective. Maybe we all need a little star gazing right now."

Cape Lookout National Seashore received the certification after a rigorous application process that took two years and required the support of partners like Crystal Coast Stargazers, Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center and the Carteret County Chamber of Commerce. The certification required an evaluation of the light fixtures within the park and surrounding area. In some cases, light fixtures were retrofitted or replaced altogether to meet dark-sky-friendly lighting requirements. Finally, the certification required the development of a plan to maintain outdoor lighting into the future, to protect the park's dark skies for the benefit of the next generation of night sky enthusiasts.

"The International Dark Skies project has been a learning process for all of us and we are very honored to be part of bringing this new appreciation for our natural world to locals, visitors and students," said Karen Amspacher, Executive Director of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center.

"Congratulations to everyone who has worked so hard to make this a reality for Down East Carteret County, the first on the East Coast!"

"The Carteret County Chamber of Commerce is thrilled to be associated with this international certification," said Tom Kies, President of the Carteret County Chamber of Commerce. "It gives people yet another reason to come and visit the Crystal Coast. What a wonderful gift it is to have an unfettered view of the universe from our little patch of paradise."

In support of dark sky conservation and education, Cape Lookout National Seashore, in partnership with Crystal Coast Stargazers, regularly presents astronomy programs throughout the year for the public to experience the beautiful night skies in eastern Carteret County and the southern Outer Banks area. These public programs include presentations designed to educate the public on the effect of light pollution and ways to minimize those effects. Park staff and members of the Crystal Coast Stargazers continue to provide outreach presentations on limiting light pollution to community agencies and groups.

"Partnering with Cape Lookout National Seashore in their application process has been a way to give back to the park that has provided so many enjoyable hours of stargazing for our club members," said David Heflin, Club Coordinator for the Crystal Coast Stargazers. "Now, everyone will be aware of the nighttime treasure we have here on the North Carolina coast!"

The International Dark Sky Places Program was founded in 2001 as a non-regulatory and voluntary program to encourage communities, parks, and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through effective lighting policies, environmentally responsible outdoor lighting, and public education. When used indiscriminately, artificial light can disrupt ecosystems, impact human health, waste money and energy, contribute to climate change and block our view and connection to the universe. Cape Lookout National Seashore now joins more than 190 places that have demonstrated robust community support for dark sky advocacy and strive to protect the night from light pollution.