

The Atlantic Coast Finally Has Its First International Dark Sky Park

The Harkers Island site was awarded the certification after a two-year process.



The Atlantic coast finally has its first International Dark Sky Park. Following a two-year process, the [International Dark-Sky Association](#) announced last week that [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#), located on Harkers Island in North Carolina, was awarded the certification, which means that it has [exceptional night-sky conditions](#) and [astronomy activities](#).

"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," International Dark-Sky Association director Ashley Wilson said in [a statement](#).



CREDIT: CRYSTAL COAST STARGAZERS/ALEX GU

Of particular note, she said its adaptive lighting controls meet the association's [Fixture Seal of Approval](#) at its [Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center](#). During the process, all the fixtures were analyzed, with some being retrofitted to meet the standards. Cape Lookout also had to outline its future plans for protecting the dark skies by maintaining outdoor lighting.

The process was done in conjunction with the National Park Service's landmark partners, including Crystal Coast Stargazers, Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center, and the [Carteret County Chamber of Commerce](#). While the 56-mile shore may not be the most widely known location within the NPS, it hopes the new title will help highlight the natural beauty of the area.

"What a wonderful gift it is to have an unfettered view of the universe from our little patch of paradise," Tom Kies, Carteret County Chamber of Commerce president, [said](#). "It gives people yet another reason to come and visit the Crystal Coast."

Cape Lookout also offers astronomy programs with Crystal Coast Stargazers, both to view the night sky and educate the public about light pollution. "Now, everyone will be aware of the nighttime treasure we have here on the North Carolina coast," Crystal Coast Stargazers club coordinator David Heflin said.

Indeed, the seashore has long been a wonder for its locals, who simply want to share the magical views they've known about. "Embarking on this project helped me remember the wonder and amazement I felt going into the night sky as a child," Cape Lookout National Seashore superintendent Jeff West said. "The possibilities I imagined then are still there, dwarfing life's daily demands when put into perspective. Maybe we all need a little [stargazing](#) right now."