

Oracle Dark Skies Committee
Minutes 4/10/2014
Kannally House, Oracle State Park

Mike Weasner, Chair, opened the meeting with a discussion of the reasons for his interest, the reasons to have dark skies and the preliminary work done toward making Oracle State Park an International Dark Skies Park.

At this initial committee meeting, all business was reports or, in the case of action items, New Business. No motions were made.

Mike said that he had bought land in Oracle in 2004 after seeing the qualities of Oracle, including its dark skies, that he and his wife, Laurraine Tutihasi had built their house in 2008-2009 and had been active in various aspects of Oracle life since then.

Recently, he had seen that the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) was requesting that public spaces become involved in their programs. He knew that the Oracle State Park would probably be eligible and interested, so he began finding out what it would take for the park to become affiliated with Dark Skies.

He noted the benefits of retaining dark skies as much as possible

- * Light at night can have negative effects on animals, including people.
- * \$2 Billion is wasted each year in the US by lighting that is not useful (aiming the wrong way, not have the desired effect). This costs the owner of the lights as well as those negatively affected by them.
- * Energy used wastefully contributes toward various negative effects of over-use of energy around the globe.

He said that the IDA , based in Tucson, is establishing Dark Skies parks, communities and reserves. Flagstaff is a dark-skies community and part of the Grand Canyon National Park is a reserve.

In order to begin the process of adding Oracle State Park, Mike Weasner met with Jennifer Rinio, Park Ranger and two managers from Arizona State Parks. Since they were very interested, a group of local people who might be interested were contacted and invited to the Committee meeting tonight.

Weasner pointed out that Pinal County had revised their lighting code in 2010, using many of the same points as the IDA (partly using his advice to do so).

The process of affiliating begins with the nomination process, using the International Dark-Sky Association "Dark Sky Park Program Criteria" on their website.

To that end, Weasner showed the meeting group two sample nomination packages. He said that groups can be nominated at the Gold, Silver or Bronze level.

REQUIREMENTS for OSP nomination

A. Since a number of nomination letters are required, he suggested asking for such letters from

- * Arizona State parks Executive Director Bryan Martyn
- * Arizona Governor Jan Brewer
- * Oracle State Park Ranger Steve Haas
- * Oracle State Park Ranger Jennifer Rinio
- * One of both Arizona Senators
- * Arizona US District One Representative Ann Kirkpatrick - who has already agreed to send one
- * Other Arizona politicians
- * Pinal County politicians, including Pete Rios, Supervisor
- * International Dark Sky Association members
- * Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association President
- * Oracle Elementary School District #2 Superintendent, Dennis Blauser
- * Mammoth-San Manuel Unified School District #8 Superintendent John Ryan
- * Local Businesses

Other possibilities put forward by the committee members were:

- Central Arizona College
- Steward Observatory

B. A history of Oracle State Park and community involvement in astronomy.

- * A history of the involvement of the Steward family of Oracle in the founding of Steward Observatory, for which it is named - to be researched and written by Evaline Auerbach, local historian.
- * A history of the Oracle State Park, with particular emphasis in “star parties” held there and facilities used. (The last such event had about 30 attendees, on the patio and with a program inside in a room that holds, potentially 50 people.)

C. Personnel: Interest from the rangers and volunteers. Weasner is being trained as a volunteer and will head up an assessment of current facilities and a lighting census, advising changes where necessary. It is possible for people to become official certified to be a professional star-party presenter.

D. Facilities

General

- * The whole of OSP is just inside the darkest sky map put out by “The World Atlas of the Artificial Night Sky Brightness”.
- * The American Avenue parking lot (near highway 77 at the east Oracle exit) is a prime spot for nighttime access with a large parking lot.
- * Weasner will measure the darkness of the sky in various places in OSP and in various conditions of the atmosphere.
- * The mountains block the light from Tucson. An anecdote was told about how some astronomers from the Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association (TAAA) who were used to using the “third star over” for telescope alignments were confused because the same spot in the sky was, in Oracle with its dark sky showing much fainter stars, the “10th star over.”

Specific: Lights in the parking lot are not appropriate and are not even conducive for safety, since they blind one, making it impossible to see snakes and so forth. They require lower wattage and shielding. Other lights at the park need to be examined similarly.

E. Sponsorship - need widespread, varied levels, sometimes non-monetary.

- * Friends of Oracle State Park has agreed to be a sponsor; it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.
- * Bed and Breakfasts
- * Other visitor services - restaurants and gas stations
- * Realtors
- * Constructors (already required to follow the Pinal County code for new and retrofit lighting).
- * Individuals

FUTURE ACTIONS

- * since the next date for acceptance of a nomination package is July 28th (there is one every quarter), this will be the date to aim for completion.
- * The committee will meet weekly for the next few weeks:

Signed,

/signed/

Evaline Auerbach, Recorder

Signed,

/signed/

Mike Weasner, Chair

Suggestions: All members of the committee reply when they have read and approved the minutes. If any member has a suggestion, reply to Mike with the suggested change. That way, at the meetings, all the Chair has to do is state that the minutes were submitted to all committee members and approved. Motion to accept committee approval, second. Done. We may need a hard copy of each, so , the day of the meeting, I'll print one from the website and bring it, signed by me. Chair signs it and places it in the packet to keep.