

February 16, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned, write to express our collective support for Nevada Senate Bill No. 52 (hereafter SB52), which requires the Administrator of the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation to establish by regulation a program for awarding a state dark sky designation in Nevada. This important legislation acknowledges Nevada's extraordinary dark night skies not only as an important public natural resource to be celebrated, preserved, and protected--but also ensconces in Nevada law their intrinsic value, as a quality of life indicator for Nevadans, as an economic amplifier in terms of dark sky tourism, and as an ecologically, astronomically, and environmentally vital natural resource.

Nevada has a long history of stewarding its natural heritage and working to conserve important indicators of the state's unique and special characteristics, including its dark, starry night skies. Massacre Rim Dark Sky Sanctuary in northern Washoe County is one of only fourteen dark sky sanctuaries in the world, the seventh to be certified as such by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) in 2019. Great Basin National Park is similarly an IDA-certified Dark Sky Park, and home to the Great Basin Observatory, the first research-grade observatory ever built in a U.S. National Park. Set at an elevation of 6,825 feet, with no significant man-made light for 70 miles in all directions, the observatory is a state-of-the-art, remotely operated, optical astronomical telescope used by astronomers and students around the world to advance the educational value and scientific importance of Nevada's dark night skies.

Nevada communities historically have a familiar Western development arc, with economies based upon mineral resources now being diversified based more upon the scenic, environmental, recreation, and conservation advantages of abundant public lands, and the value and importance (naturally, culturally, and economically) of starry night skies. Communities such as Tonopah, with its Star Trails and Star Park, and Ely's internationally renowned Northern Nevada Railway Great Basin Star Train, also contribute to Nevada's already important ranking among dark sky destinations. These amenities enhance the quality of life for residents in these communities, but also create important tourist experiences that are helping rural Nevada communities to stabilize and diversify their economies, creating jobs and opportunities for recreation- and tourism-based businesses.

Nevada's dark night skies are resources for the public good. Encouraging their conservation and stewardship, promotion, and protection through SB52 not only benefits tourism and the quality of life that Nevada's rural places already enjoy, but acknowledges and solidifies Nevada's considerable advantage as a dark sky destination. We strongly encourage its swift passage.

Respectfully,

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