

## **DARK SKY PLACES CLASS SYSTEM**

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### **Known names for present and proposed dark sky places**

The following are terms in use or proposed in the context of dark sky protected areas and other places. They appear in conference and workshop proceedings, and in communications with dark sky experts in various countries.

- Dark Sky Park
- Dark Sky Preserve
- International Dark Sky Park
- International Dark Sky Reserve
- International Dark Sky Community
- Suburban Outreach Site
- Starlight Reserve
- Starlight Oasis
- Starlight Theme Park
- Starry Sky Park
- Urban Star Park

There may be, and certainly will be, others. Upon examination of the dark sky places in question, it appears that different name styles mean the same thing. For example, a dark sky preserve in Canada is equivalent to a dark sky park in the sense used by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). So to avoid confusion, and to help with reporting in an international context, DSAG has developed a common class system.

### **IUCN categories of protected natural areas**

A similar situation exists for parks, reserves and other names for protected natural areas. To facilitate international comparison and reporting, the IUCN uses a system of six categories. For example, a national park in the United Kingdom fits under category V, whereas a national park in Canada is category II. The category numbers do not indicate relative importance. All are of equal value in the protection of natural spaces and cultural landscapes. The full definitions are posted on-line at [www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/pa/pa\\_products/wcpa\\_categories/](http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/pa/pa_products/wcpa_categories/). You can search for existing protected areas and find their basic description and IUCN category at [www.protectedplanet.net](http://www.protectedplanet.net). The categories are:

- I Strict protection
  - Ia Strict Nature Reserve
  - Ib Wilderness Area
- II Ecosystem conservation and recreation (National Park)
- III Conservation of natural features (Natural Monument)
- IV Conservation through active management (Habitat/Species Management Area)
- V Landscape/seascape conservation and recreation (Protected Landscape/Seascape)
- VI Sustainable use of natural ecosystems (Managed Resource Protected Area)

### **DSAG classes of dark sky places**

The IUCN approach to protected area categories is adopted as a model for the DSAG system. To qualify as a dark sky protected area, a place should:

- be an officially protected area in the sense understood by the IUCN;
- have management policies and practices in place to protect or restore natural darkness; and
- be recognized either by an authoritative body at arms length from the protected area agency itself, for example the IDA, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, the Hungarian Astronomical Union, or by legislation, regulation or policy of the appropriate national, territorial, state or provincial jurisdiction.

A class for dark sky communities is added to facilitate the inclusion of the IDA's dark sky community designation. The classes are:

- 1 Starlight Reserve:** astronomy observatory site and surrounding area
- 2 Dark Sky Park:** protected natural area
  - 2a Park, reserve, habitat, natural area or other ecological protection
  - 2b Unpopulated area set aside for traditional or sacred practices related to the sky
  - 2c Rural area, area of outstanding landscape beauty
- 3 Dark Sky Heritage Site:** protected heritage physical works of mankind
- 4 Dark Sky Outreach Site**
  - 4a Urban or suburban site
  - 4b Rural site
- 5 Dark Sky Reserve:** mix of cooperating community, rural and natural area jurisdictions
- 6 Dark Sky Community:** an entire village, town or city

Since some dark sky places could fit into more than one class, the following binary key should be used to determine the DSAG class.

### Binary key

Does the dark sky place contain a research astronomy facility?

If yes: **1 Starlight Reserve:** astronomy observatory site and surrounding area

If no, then:

Is the dark sky place a natural or rural area?

If yes: **2 Dark Sky Park:** protected natural area

**a** Park, reserve, habitat area or other ecological protection. Or:

**b** Rural or natural area set aside for traditional or sacred practices related to the sky.

Or:

**c** Rural area, area of outstanding landscape beauty

If no, then:

Does the area protect heritage structures?

If yes: **3 Dark Sky Heritage Site:** protected heritage buildings or other physical works of mankind

If no, then:

Is the area or site part of a larger urban area?

If yes: **4 Dark Sky Outreach Site**

**a** Urban or suburban site. Or:

**b** Rural site

If no, then:

Is the area a mix of cooperating community, rural and natural area jurisdictions?

If yes **5 Dark Sky Reserve**

If no, then:

Does the area correspond to an entire village, town or city?

If yes: **6 Dark Sky Community**