

For Immediate Release

17 Hill Country Communities Represented at Regional Dark Sky Conference in Fredericksburg

(May 31, 2017) “There are more community efforts to preserve the night sky in the Hill Country than there are in any other similarly sized region on earth.” That was the message from Dr. John Barentine, Program Manager for the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), at the Hill Country Dark Sky Conference in Fredericksburg on Friday, May 19th. “And, as this region grows, these efforts will pay off in a higher quality of life, energy savings, increased tourism, and a night sky worthy of our children’s wonder. But we must continue our efforts to enjoy these benefits in the future.”

Seventeen communities across the region were represented at the conference, including Bandera, Blanco, Boerne, Castroville, Dripping Springs, Fredericksburg, Johnson City, Junction, and Kerrville. The elected officials, city staff, and volunteers in attendance discussed strategies for raising awareness, directing new development towards good lighting, and working with utilities that provide street lighting. Representatives of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, Central Texas Electric Cooperative, and Bandera Electric Cooperative were also in attendance.

The initial idea for the conference came from Kent Myers, Fredericksburg’s City Manager. “We know how important the Dark Sky initiative is to us here in Fredericksburg, with Enchanted Rock just up the road. But I think we can do more here and I believe Hill Country communities will be more effective at preserving our night skies if we work together,” Myers said.

The Fredericksburg City Council recently directed staff to apply for a Dark Sky Community designation from the IDA. This distinction, already granted to Dripping Springs and Horseshoe Bay, will help raise awareness within the community and put Fredericksburg on the map for star-gazers around the world.

To organize and convene the conference, Myers worked with the Hill Country Alliance, the Gillespie County Economic Development Corporation, and the Putman Mountain Observatory. Space for the afternoon event was provided by the Texas Tech University Center.

At the end of the conference, participants signaled their support for coming together again later in the year to share their progress, learn more from one another, and discuss strategies for spreading awareness even further. The Hill Country Alliance committed to making sure that such a follow up meeting takes place. “It is incredible how dedicated communities in the Hill Country are to preserving our night sky. Whether it is throwing star parties, working with local businesses to improve their lighting, or adopting

ordinances, just about every community in the region is doing something and working on doing more,” said Cliff Kaplan, Program Manager for the Alliance. “We are proud to support their efforts however we can.”

For more information on the regional work to preserve Hill Country night skies, visit www.hillcountrynightskies.org.

The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at www.hillcountryalliance.org.

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Contact:

Katherine Romans, Executive Director

Hill Country Alliance

katherine@hillcountryalliance.org

512-410-9368



Photograph by: Todd Winters

(Larger image available)