

Hill Country Night Sky Month - Event and Activity Suggestions

This document will help you generate ideas for possible events, contests, and activities to host as part of Hill Country Night Sky Month. If you have any questions about any of the following information, email dawn@hillcountryalliance.org.

Before jumping into the list of suggestions, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Who do you want to engage?** Is there a specific age group, a particular geographic area, or a certain sector (public, business owners, government officials, etc.) with which you wish to connect?
- **With whom can you partner?** Are there any local institutions or organizations that already are or could become champions for the night sky? Some examples of valuable local partners might include schools, electric utilities, local parks, the chamber of commerce, prominent local businesses, the local government, the Lions or Rotary Clubs, local Keep Texas Beautiful groups, etc.
- **How will you promote it?** The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) will promote all shared events through the [NightSkyMonth.org](https://www.hillcountryalliance.org/night-sky-month) website, our HCA newsletter, and social media under **#NightSkyMonth**. What are other good ways for you to promote the event in your area? Check out the content in this promotional toolkit for additional resources, such as a sample press release.
- **COVID safety.** Unfortunately, we all still have to keep COVID safety in mind this year. If you are considering an in-person event, please ensure that social distancing will be possible and make sure to check in with your local government for additional guidelines or rules.
- **Contests of many kinds.** Poetry, art, photography, songwriting, and so on—with a night sky theme are good options to get the community involved. When deciding how participants can best share their submissions, weigh the pros and cons of in-person or online events.
- **We are here to help.** Let us know if you would like to discuss any of these ideas or your ideas, and we will be happy to assist! Email dawn@hillcountryalliance.org.

EVENT IDEAS

Star Party

Plan an in-person or virtual tour of our night sky with an astronomer. HCA can help you identify and connect with the experts needed to offer either form of star party to your community.

Stellar Stories and Songs

Broadcast campfire stories about the myths represented in the stars or sing campfire songs about the night sky. These can be live or pre-recorded so that people can listen while looking up at the night sky from their homes. You can also invite the community to submit the stories they love. You can do this on Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram in a live or pre-recorded format. (Combine this with a story or song contest.)

Invite an Author

Invite an author to read their book or an excerpt of their story. Share it with your audience in a live or pre-recorded format. There are several books on light pollution and the night sky, written for adults and children. Contact Dawn at dawn@hillcountryalliance.org for a list of titles.

Lights Out Event

Join Texan by Nature and promote “[Lights Out Texas](#)” in your community. All Texans can take simple action to protect birds during peak migration (Sept 5-Oct 29) – just be sure your lighting is off or minimal. It’s as easy as the flick of a switch!

Art Night

Show night-sky-themed art and have artists or others talk about what the pieces mean to them. (Combined this with an art class or contest.)

Astrophotography Class

We have many excellent astrophotographers in our region and many more people who would love to learn this rewarding craft. Work with a skilled astrophotographer to create a class in-person or online – folks can meet in the field or tune in, gear in hand, from their back yards.

Story Time for Kids

Invite kids and families to listen to a bedtime story about the night sky at your local library or online. Suggested books: “[Cassandra and the Night Sky](#)” by the Hill Country’s own [Amy Jackson](#), “[There Once was a Sky Full of Stars](#)” by [Bob Crelin](#), “[Good Night Sky: A Children’s Bedtime Story](#)” by [E.M. Makins](#). Contact Dawn at dawn@hillcountryalliance.org for a list of titles and authors or download it from the Hill Country Night Sky Month [Host an Event Page](#).

Expert Interview or Panel Discussion

HCA can help you identify and connect with the experts needed to create an educational talk or panel for your event. Subjects could include astronomy, the impacts of light pollution on nocturnal wildlife in Texas, the value of astrotourism to our communities, or the 2024 solar eclipse coming to our region.

Make a Night Skies Presentation to City Council or Community Leaders

Present on night-sky preservation for your community's city council, school board, commissioners court, chamber of commerce, civic clubs, religious groups, or students. We can help facilitate introductions and assist you in the presentation process. If you don't feel qualified to give such a presentation, we can connect you to the right folks.

Please tag **#NightSkyMonth** on social media for all events, so the Hill Country sees it!

CONTEST IDEAS

You need to have a few things in place to run a successful contest, including judges, evaluation criteria, and prizes (even if they are tokens or gags). The [Hill Country Alliance](#) and the [Blanco County Friends of the Night Sky](#) have experience running contests, and we are happy to help if you need any assistance!

Night Sky Essay Contest

Invite your community (select an age group or open the competition to multiple age groups) to share their thoughts and feelings about the night sky or night sky preservation in prose. Print submissions or excerpts in the local paper, add them to your group's website or social media or recite them during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Story Contest

Invite your community (select an age group or open the contest to multiple age groups) to share original stories about the night skies or the night in general. Print submissions or excerpts in the local paper, add them to your group's website or social media or recited during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Art Contest

Invite your community (select an age group or open the contest to multiple age groups) to share their night-sky-themed art. Print all submissions or just winners in the local paper, add to your group's website or social media, project onto a wall downtown, or display and discuss during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Photography Contest

Invite your community (select an age group or open the contest to multiple age groups) to share their nighttime photography and photography of dark-sky-friendly lighting in your community. Print submissions in the local paper, add them to your group's website or social media, project onto a wall downtown, or display and discuss during a Night Sky Month event.

Compile the contest submissions from the list above into a magazine or small book to sell or give away in the community. There are online services that can help with layout and printing. [The Hill Country Alliance](#) can point you in the right direction if this is of interest.

Night Sky Video Contest

Invite your community to share short videos about the night sky to promote night-sky-friendly lighting and night sky preservation in your community. Share submissions on the web.

Halloween Costume Contest

Invite your community to dress up to celebrate the night sky for Halloween. Adorn yourself as an astronaut, engineer, space traveler, Doctor Who, an alien, or anything that makes you want to marvel at the wonders of the universe above our heads. Share photographs and submit photos of your community wearing their costumes through social media to celebrate Hill Country Night Sky Month. Be sure to tag **#NightSkyMonth** to show off your masterpiece!

Better Lighting Contest

Invite your local community to improve their outdoor lighting and make it fun! Invite folks to share their commitment to preserving night skies by posting before and after photos on social media.

Please tag **#NightSkyMonth** on social media for all contests, so the Hill Country sees it!

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Citizen Science - Globe at Night

Invite your community to participate in the monthly [Globe at Night](#) citizen-science campaign over two weeks in October. Set a goal for the number of observations collected in your community. You can take this one step further and join the [Globe at Night Adopt a Street Program](#).

Share the Stars with Kids

Check out the [Dark Sky Rangers](#) program, the [Family Sky Heroes](#) activity, and other activities for all ages from the [Astronomy Society of the Pacific](#). Learn how to find constellations using [Uncle Al's Skywheels](#) or [Skymaps.com](#).

Lighting Retrofit

Night Sky Month is an excellent time for lighting retrofit projects in your community. They can be high-profile locations, like a County Courthouse, school, ball field, or supermarket, or more low-key at residents' homes around town. We can help you get the word out and educate the community on how to do it and why. Big lighting projects – like stadium lighting – can take months of planning, Hill Country Night Sky Month is a great time to kick off those ventures. Try engaging a local hardware store as a partner for discounted or donated light fixtures if any are needed.

Conduct a Lighting Survey

Conduct a lighting survey at your local school or library, or downtown. Use this as a way to cheer on the usage of [proper night sky lighting](#) or to promote improvements to your community's existing lighting. Conduct the lighting survey yourself or let [Hill Country Alliance](#) put you in contact with a lighting survey specialist.

Make Your Neighborhood a “Night Sky Friendly Neighborhood”

If you live within a Home Owners Association (HOA), designate your neighborhood as Night Sky Friendly by [adopting this simple language](#) into your HOA agreements. [Visit our webpage](#) for more information about this program.

Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program

Encourage local businesses to become Night Sky Friendly through HCA's Night Sky Friendly Business recognition program. [Visit our webpage](#) for more information about this program.

Become a member of your local Friends of the Night Sky group

The Texas Hill Country is home to a growing number of [Friends of the Night Sky groups](#) throughout the region. They would love for you to be involved! If your county does not have a group yet and would like to help start one, please let us know at info@hillcountryalliance.org.

Become a member of the Texas Chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association

The International Dark-Sky Association began its mission to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting in 1988. [Join the Texas Chapter of the IDA](#) and support their efforts, connect with other dark sky advocates from around our region, share resources, and become a member of the worldwide movement.

For all of these events, contests, and activities, please tag **#NightSkyMonth** on social media so the Hill Country sees it!