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HOPEWELL BIG WOODS NAMED NIGHT SKIES CONSERVATION AREA

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Is there anything that can be done to control the ever increasing light pollution in the Hopewell Big Woods? Plenty, says the PA Outdoor Lighting Council, and to that end they hope to protect the area as Pennsylvania's first "Night Skies Conservation Area."

The night sky within the 110 square mile Hopewell Big Woods, which includes French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, used to be dark enough for viewing of the stars and Milky Way. Increased development, and number of shopping centers and other overly lit venues has added a glow to the sky that denies plants and animals the natural darkness they need each night. The unwanted glare from floodlights on homes robs neighbors of a restful night of sleep.

The aim of the Night Skies Conservation Area designation, as stated by POLC member Stan Stubbe, "is to support the preservation aims within the 73,000-acre Hopewell Big Wood's. Outdoor lighting that is excessive, improperly aimed, unshielded or on when not needed is bad for the environment, bad for our wallets, bad for our neighbors, and spoils the natural beauty of Pennsylvania's night sky." he said. Using the Night-Skies Conservation Area designation as the theme, the POLC plans to inform homeowners, businesses and municipal officials about the ill effects of light pollution and to provide solutions on how it can be reduced or prevented.

The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership is administered by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Natural Lands Trust. According to Dr. Jim Thorne, Coordinator of the Partnership, "The aim of the project is to have the area preserved and protected from further uncontrolled development. It encompasses the last large, unbroken forest left in southeastern Pennsylvania and one of the most important natural areas in the region. The area is an exceptional resource with hundreds of plant and bird species, pristine forest, unique wetlands and clean streams providing open space, drinking water, and unique scenic, cultural and natural resources. It is greatly valued as an asset for public recreation."

Eric Brown, Manager of French Creek State Park and Marsh Creek State Park, has expressed his enthusiasm in supporting the effort to control light pollution within the Parks. Lisa Miller, instructor at the Park, is taking steps to increase awareness of campers and visitors by holding night walks to point out the beauty of the star-filled sky and to explain the ill-effects of light pollution on the environment.

According to Edie Sheehan Hammond, Superintendent of Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, "We take our role to control light pollution within the park very seriously. Our outdoor lights are shielded and on only when needed. In the Visitor Center we have available for purchase special shields for floodlights that make them neighbor and dark-sky friendly. In support of amateur astronomers, we host Chesmont Astronomical Society's StarFest and other stargazing events."

Crow's Nest Preserve, a 612 acre land set-aside within Hopewell Big Woods and owned and maintained by Natural Lands Trust, adheres to the principles of good lighting. Dan Barringer, Preserve Manager, observed that their outdoor lighting throughout the

Preserve uses energy-efficient LED shielded sources that is motion-sensor controlled so on only when needed.

Of the 9 municipalities within Hopewell Big Woods, East Vincent, East Nantmeal, North Coventry, South Coventry, Union, Robeson, Warwick, West Vincent, and West Nantmeal, 8 have effective outdoor lighting ordinances and they enforce them, especially when developers of commercial establishments propose to use bad lighting practices.

The following legislators who represent the municipalities and residents within Hopewell Big Woods have provided letters in support of the movement to bring light pollution under control: US Senator Jim Gerlach, State Senators John Rafferty, Jr. and Andy Dinniman, and State Representatives Curt Schroder and Mark Gillen.

The PA Outdoor Lighting Council is a volunteer non-profit organization whose aim is to protect the environment, the night sky and neighbors from abusive and wasteful outdoor lighting. Visit the POLC website at www.polcouncil.org.

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