



**The Land Between**

Cottage Country's Conservation Organization

[www.thelandbetween.ca](http://www.thelandbetween.ca)

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# **DARK SKIES FOR OUR HEALTH**



## DARKNESS IS GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH

Have you ever stood outside your door, when the air is cool and dense and looked up at the night sky to see the Milky Way; the stars scattered and glimmering like diamonds against a sheet of black silk. Night skies are not only valued by humans, but they are important for our own health as well as the activities and functions of many species. Plants, to insects, bats and birds all benefit from the dark at night.

When the night sky is littered with an artificial glow much is disrupted. Lights at night attract and disorientate animals; it interrupts birds sleeping and feeding patterns; feeding areas for night-hunting birds, such as owls, are reduced. Most songbirds migrate at night in safety and set their internal compasses by the position of the setting sun; this evolutionary process is upset by lighting the dusk and the night. Fatal collisions of songbirds with illuminated buildings are common in cities.

Lights attract insects which will then be killed by the heat of the bulb, or will circle until they are too exhausted either to feed or procreate. Fireflies have a harder time finding mates due to additional light. And, the life cycle of plants and trees are also affected by preventing them from losing their leaves or by changing flowering times and patterns.

Darkness is also our friend, not foe. Our mental health, the health of our immune systems and overall functions are all aligned with the 24 hour dark-light cycle. Even our REM sleep is more complete in total darkness.

The wise use of lighting can enhance safety and security. Lighting stairs or a driveway can make sense. However, a balance can be achieved. Lighting the ground and not the sky and only when needed is a very simple solution. Eliminating glare by using light covers, using sensors with lower wattage bulbs, and also being considerate of your neighbors so your lights do not shine across or alight their properties, are all solutions.

In 1999, through a partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and lead by members of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation, the Torrance Barrens Conservation Area, southeast of Bala in Muskoka, was designated as the world's first permanent Dark Sky Reserve.

Others have since followed suit: In 2007 organizations of UNESCO met in Spain to present a declaration in support of dark skies for all humanity ([www.starlight2007.net](http://www.starlight2007.net)). The Haliburton Forest & Wild Life Reserve Ltd. can be considered a 60,000 acre dark sky reserve. Manitoulin Island now boasts a Dark Sky Sanctuary. Both Gravenhurst and Huntsville have dark sky friendly street lighting. In September 2003 the Muskoka Heritage Foundation hosted the International Ecology of the Night Symposium ([www.ecologyofthenight.org](http://www.ecologyofthenight.org)). Annual celebration and tours take place in Muskoka today. Many cottage associations have adopted policies for "lights out". Successfully campaigns for dark sky preserves are spread throughout The Land Between. From many areas in the region you can see clearly individual stars and galaxies.

**For more information on how to conserve night skies in your area or to locate dark sky preserves in Ontario, contact the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (888-924-7272, [www.rasc.ca](http://www.rasc.ca)) or your local astronomy club.**