



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.)  
National Public Observatory Newsletter  
***“Where the Public Meets the Stars”***

Astronomy education, dark skies and quality experiences for ALL!!  
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STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN FIVE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Summer 2005

## National Public Observatory board accepts land offer

By Jessica Savage  
and John Gilkison

LAS CRUCES, NM -- The National Public Observatory may become the centerpiece of an astronomy community in Southern New Mexico if everything goes according to plan.

All five NPO Board members voted unanimously last month to accept a generous offer by Wes Light of Gadcom, Inc. of 40-acres of land within his 120-acre Sunshine Wells Ranch, 17 miles south of Deming. “This is an exciting opportunity for the NPO to find a home,” NPO President John Gilkison said. “The site in Deming is very suitable.”

Light, a corporate NPO member featured in the Winter 2004 newsletter, is an astronomy enthusiast seeking to use his assets to benefit astronomy--a passion he inherited from his late father.

“While the donation of the land is not yet final,” Gilkison said, “The board is very appreciative of this generous offer by Wes Light and Gadcom, Inc.”

If the transfer becomes final and funding for infrastructure is secured, Gilkison said the 40 acres could become the home of the NPO where the public can go to have quality astronomy experiences in a dark sky setting.

Light said he envisions turning his ranch into an astronomy community, a dark sky site where amateurs could inexpensively set up a second home for observing. City, county and business officials have expressed support for the project, he said, including the Deming Chamber of Commerce which liked the idea of astronomy tourism. Light said he has also been working with the city of Deming and Luna County on developing outdoor lighting ordinances that would protect the area’s dark sky resources. The NPO provided copies of the Las Cruces and the El Paso outdoor lighting ordinances. Light requested a written business plan from the NPO, which was prepared by Gilkison, that would detail how the 40 acres of land would be used, and Light also requested NPO board involvement. A resolution to accept the land was immediately drafted after the vote, with the stipulation that if the land is not received by the end of the year, a new resolution will be required because officers serve for one year with elections held each January. The NPO plan calls for a ten-fold increase in membership by 2008, which would help to financially support the observatory, and the acquisition of  
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**Wes Light, on the right and Dave Oesper view Gadcom Inc land in March during a Oesper family visit to New Mexico for a Spring 2005 vacation.**

## State parks to reimburse volunteers

By Jessica Savage

Stars-N-Parks presenters will be reimbursed for expenses such as mileage and equipment, and the National Public Observatory may be able to secure funding for programs or training under new funding received by New Mexico State Parks.

State parks was the recipient of two separate appropriations funding in the 2005 legislative session that effect their astronomy and other programs.

"We don't know exactly what this will mean for us yet," said NPO President John Gilkison, "But being reimbursed for mileage is significant. It's a big deal because it's one of the biggest expenses for presenters."

NMSP Park Resource Specialist Steve Cary said in a telephone interview that presenters and others will register as official volunteers by filling out an application, and once recognized by the state, volunteers will submit timesheets and their mileage information.

According to the approved house bill (HB273), volunteers "may receive per diem and mileage pursuant to the Per Diem and Mileage Act as well as reimbursement for uniforms, supplies and equipment used for the volunteer's work at the park."

Although volunteers are not considered employees, the approved bill also states that volunteers may use state vehicles in the performance of the volunteer activity and will be covered under the state's vehicle insurance, and they may also use state computers for related duties.

"Volunteers are absolutely vital to the well being of New Mexico State Parks," the Fiscal Impact Report states in part. "Volunteers must play an even larger role in the future if the

**Spring SNMSP attendees observe the April 8th partial solar eclipse. Jeff Jenkins left, Henrietta Hovarter right.**



**The Partial Solar Eclipse on Friday April 8, 2005 observed at the Southern New Mexico Star Party, held at City of Rocks State Park in Faywood, New Mexico.**

state park system is to prosper and improve."

Volunteers provide the equivalent of 54 full-time employees, which add nearly 20 percent to the park's workforce, the report says. There is a competitive market for volunteers and officials want to reward them so they will continue their role.

Also funded at \$80,000 was the "Reach For The Stars" New Mexico State Parks Night Sky Education Initiative, which has three components: Program coordination, dark sky protection and equipment maintenance.

State Representative Rhonda King said in a telephone interview that she was recruited by NMSP Director Dave Simon to introduce the bill because she had been a co-sponsor of the Dark Sky Protection Act. The initiative gives weight to the act by allowing the state parks to become a leader in minimizing light pollution inside its parks by funding the replacement of outdated fixtures or shielding existing ones.

"The Dark Sky Protection Act is on everyone's radar," Cary said, "We want to speak with authority and knowledge."

Cary said park officials would be gathering in early June to develop proposals for the program coordination aspect of the initiative, which represents \$70,000 of the total funding. Whether programs will focus on training existing park staff to conduct astronomy programs or leaving that primarily in the hands of volunteers is what officials have to decide, Cary said. One aspect of night sky education should focus on the state's rich, cultural heritage of how native people characterized the night sky, Cary said.

As the resident of a small, rural community east of Albuquerque, King said she has always enjoyed the beauty of a dark, night sky since she was a child. "New Mexico is known for dark skies," she said. "We attract business, science and dark sky tourism."

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**NPO President John Gilkison stands on the new City of Rocks State Park observatory pad which had just been poured prior to the Spring SNMSP**

### NPO board accepts land offer con't.

a 30-inch telescope that would be housed in a roll-off roof observatory.

Gilkison and his family traveled to the Denver area over Memorial Day Weekend to view and appraise a 30-inch Newtonian telescope that would be ideal for the observatory. The telescope is a New Generation Telescope (NGT), a brand manufactured and sold by Jim's Mobile Inc (JMI) where President Jim Burr demonstrated the 30-inch to Gilkison. The telescope has a three-mirror folded optics system, which results in a lower height placement of the eyepiece, which is only 66 inches off the ground in the NGT. Other 30-inch telescopes require a 12-foot ladder to reach the eyepiece.

"Climbing a 12-foot ladder in the dark is not a good way to go," Gilkison said. "With a 66-inch eyepiece height even children will be able to observe using only a step ladder." The telescope has an aperture of 30 inches and a focal length of F/4.2, which is equal to 126 inches. It also has a Go/To system capable of finding 14,900 objects and alt/az tracking. "It's an ideal telescope for doing public outreach astronomy," Gilkison said.

### Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party Report

by John Gilkison

Adverse weather hampered this year's Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party held in April at City of Rocks State Park. On the first night, patrons of the National Public Observatory-sponsored star party only got a couple hours of observing in before cloud cover moved in for the night.

On Friday afternoon, attendees were treated to a partial solar eclipse which lasted about an hour. Skies were clear for this event, as they were for a Friday evening of spectacular observing in clear skies. The clarity of the skies permitted naked eye observations of the globular clusters M13, M5, M3, and NGC 5139, which indicates the state park is an excellent dark sky site.

Saturday night was clouded out with winds and storms in the area. Our experience with the spring weather patterns at the park indicate to us that it may be better to schedule our SNMSP in late April rather than the early part of the month. Next year's Spring 2006 SNMSP is planned for April 22, 23, and 24, 2006. Regular Stars-n-Parks programming will utilize the new observatory once it is ready.



**Ashley Gilkison modeling the JMI NGT 30 in. Telescope at JMI headquarters in Denver, CO.**

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*Tens of thousands of people visit major U.S. research astronomical observatories every year. These research facilities do not advertise, and quite altruistically, set aside monies and time from their limited budgets to accommodate the public. Many people travel great distances for the opportunity to observe through a world-class telescope but due to the high cost of telescope time, this generally is not feasible. Where observatories have been able to set aside a night for public observing, it is often booked up well in advance.*

*While some upscale observatory/lodge facilities have been developed, none have been established to reach families or individuals looking for an intimate public park/camping experience with the proper telescopes, facilities, and knowledgeable tour guides.*

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