

# THE SKY THIS MONTH

DECEMBER 2008

## THE NIGHT SKY CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Every astronomer understands the annoyance of city lights that carelessly beam wasted light into their night sky. The light pollution created washes out the dimmer objects that normally would be seen under a truly dark sky. In some metropolitan areas, light pollution is so bad that only the brightest stars can be seen with any certainty.

What we have to understand is that those who install these wasteful lighting fixtures are not thinking about the night sky. They are mainly thinking about advertising, safety and security. What they do not know is that these three concerns can still be satisfied while simultaneously minimizing light pollution and saving money on electricity!

One method of reducing light pollution is to give the general public an appreciation of the night sky and how fragile it is to wasteful lighting practices. The best way to do this is to educate the public about the basics of astronomy and light pollution's effects. What better opportunity to do this than in 2009, the International Year of Astronomy?!

Since 2006, the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area has hosted sky tours and spring astronomy courses to educate the general public about the wonders of the night sky and what light pollution is doing to our enjoyment of the heavens.

To celebrate the International Year of Astronomy (IYA) in 2009, these individual events have been consolidated into a program called Night Sky Conservation (NSC). This program is a pioneer effort by CASTOR and the Mississippi Valley Conservation authority (MVC) to educate the public about appreciating our night sky, the effects of light pollution and the methods of reducing it through responsible lighting practices.

The NSC program further enhances the MVC's existing philosophy of balancing the needs of the community with the needs of the natural environment by educating the public about good lighting alternatives. NSC incorporates light pollution education and good neighbour lighting solutions with general interest astronomy courses to engage the public on many levels.

The Mill of Kintail Conservation Area is a prime location to host such a program, since it is already a premier night sky viewing site recognized by the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), the Ottawa Astronomy Friends (OAFs) and local astronomers alike.

In 2009, the NSC program will consist of two astronomy courses, two free summer sky tours, and the continuation of "The Sky This Month" article in the Almonte Gazette.

The first astronomy course will consist of ten classes, held every Friday night from March 20 to May 29, 2009 (with the exception of Good Friday on April 10). The course will offer basic lessons in astronomy, including constellations, telescopes, observing the planets, clusters, nebulae and galaxies. The course will also offer lessons on the effects of light pollution and how to reduce it in your neighbourhoods.

The autumn astronomy course will consist of ten classes, held every Friday night from September 11 to November 20, 2009 (with the exception of the second NSC Sky Tour on Friday, September 18). The course will concentrate on interesting weekly astronomical objects reported in the media that can be viewed through the small telescope.

The free public summer sky tours will be held on Friday, August 21, 2009 and Friday, September 18, 2009. Experienced astronomers from all over Ottawa will give you the best night sky experience possible.

This pioneering program's educational and conservation activities can be used to serve as a blueprint for other conservation authorities across Canada who wish to reduce light pollution in their own constituencies.

Please visit [www.castor2.ca/nsc](http://www.castor2.ca/nsc) for more information about these exciting IYA events at the Mill of Kintail, including costs and enrollment options.

Past Issues: [www.castor2.ca/nsc/06\\_Sky](http://www.castor2.ca/nsc/06_Sky)

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