

Gila camp site designated 'Dark Sky Sanctuary'

Special to the Sun-News 3:28 p.m. MST January 26, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy Photo by Jay Hemphill)

SILVER CITY – Sometimes, darkness is better than light.

That is the case for the Cosmic Campground, a 3.5-acre site in the Gila National Forest which was recently named an International Dark Sky Sanctuary.

The designation, awarded by the International Dark Sky Association in January, makes the Cosmic Campground the first such designation in the U.S. and the first IDA International Dark Sky Place designation of a U.S. Forest Service location.

“This is really big for our area,” said Ann Grauer on Thursday. “This is the first-of-its-kind designation in the U.S. and it’s here in our area.”

The camp site is located 8 miles north of Alma in the Gila National Forest, and Grauer said it is so dark out there that it is possible to see shadows by star light.

“The Cosmic Campground, a peaceful, natural night sky place is ideal as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary,” Grauer stated in a news release. “We are honored to help preserve and protect this small, dark place for present and future generations to connect with their inherent fascination and attraction to our night sky.”

The campground is to be maintained in a state that allows visitors to experience nighttime conditions close to those before the introduction of electric lighting in the late 19th century. At the same time, visitors can access modern conveniences, such as Wi-Fi network connectivity via a cell tower located 15 miles to the south of the Cosmic Campground.

Grauer said the campground will be an economic benefit for western New Mexico. Tourists who come for the extremely remote character of the nearby Gila Wilderness will find that the campground “extends the sense of the area’s primitive quality past sunset.”

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich hailed the IDA designation in a news release on Thursday.

“The Cosmic Campground in Catron County brings visitors from around the United States and the world to enjoy New Mexico’s unmatched wild places,” Heinrich said.

“Outdoor recreation is a huge draw for the state and contributes to our economy as a whole,” the senator said. “I was glad to support the Cosmic Campground’s efforts in becoming an International Dark Sky Sanctuary, and I am pleased with their success. This designation will elevate the status of western New Mexico as a true destination for star gazers and dark sky enthusiasts all while boosting the economies of local communities.”

Grauer said she has met with the Catron County Board of County Commissioners, and hopes to meet with Grant County officials in the future to discuss the economic benefits of the new designation.

Information: cosmiccampground.org.