

Conserving Dark Skies in New Mexico

by Brad Young

This article is meant to toot my project team's horn a little bit. I designed and was the project manager for the little facility you see behind the sign to the Chaco Canyon historical Park. To quote the NPS website:

“The park's natural nighttime darkness, commitment to reducing light pollution, and ongoing public outreach have (sic) led to its certification as an International Dark Sky Park by the [International Dark-Sky Association \(IDA\)](#). Chaco is the fourth unit in the National Park System to earn this distinction. By receiving this designation at the Gold-tier level, Chaco rates as one of the best places in the country to experience and enjoy natural darkness.”

When I first began working in this area in December, we were unable to pipe our associated natural gas from oil production to market, due to the lack of infrastructure in the area. Since then we have been working tirelessly to get our flares put out and get the gas to market for a number of reasons. For our hobby, the biggest problem is the illumination caused by the flares burning night. With an IDA site nearby, I took it as a personal matter to get the job done. I'm happy to report that all of our flares have been extinguished.



As things continue to grow there, we've added four more sites similar to this, and I will be visiting the area to kickoff construction of an oil delivery facility right after Okie-Tex to lessen the truck traffic. Of course, there will be times when we still have to flare occasionally for short periods. And of course we are not the only operator in the area. But it's nice to know that what I do for a living is contributing to the conservation of another precious resource, our dark sky at night.

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If you are out in the Four Corners area, on vacation, as an extension of a trip to Okie-Tex, or for any reason, go see this fascinating site [during the day for an example of our Native American culture](#). Then, stick around for the dark skies at night in the designated area (be sure and tell the ranger), or visit during one of the outreach nights put on by the Albuquerque Astronomical Society (TAAS). See <http://www.nps.gov/chcu/planyourvisit/nightsky.htm> for more details.

Note: all pictures in article by me, much better ones at the website.



The great kiva in the plaza of Chetro Ketl