

SPRING 2009

Outside Bozeman

Southwest Montana's Outdoor Journal

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YEAR!

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Lights Out, Bozeman!

Why it's good to be left in the dark *by Carolyn Hopper*

Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder where you... went?

Have you looked for the North Star lately anywhere around the northeast side of town or downtown? Wasn't it brighter just a few years ago?

What's happening in the land where the "heavens are bright with the light of the glittering stars"? Light pollution! What's the source? Us! What can be done? Plenty!

What, exactly, is light pollution? For starters it's wasted energy, trespassing light, light clutter, sky glow, and any adverse effects of artificial light. Who is affected? You are when your neighbor's lights creep across your yard during a lunar eclipse. Astronomers are when they find it more and more difficult to read the skies. And


what about the young lovers who now have to drive 20 miles outside of town to go parking?

But people aren't the only victims of light pollution. Lighted towers interrupt birds' stellar and geomagnetic navigation abilities. Sea turtle hatchlings can't follow the light of the moon to the ocean. And you can forget about being a frog and trying to mate anywhere near the sky glow from a nearby sports stadium.

State Senator Bob Hawks (D) from Bozeman recently introduced a bill for "An act imposing restrictions on outdoor lighting; requiring outdoor light fixtures to be fully or partially shielded." Alas, the bill was tabled.

So what's a frog—er stargazer—to do?

It's understandable to feel overwhelmed

by all the issues of global climate change and how long it will take to make a difference. But light pollution is something that can be reduced in a short time—after all, many people might be willing to reduce their light pollution without more regulations if they understood what their light bombs do. If you wish upon that star that's been missing from your night sky for so long, your wish might come true! 

Here are some suggestions:

Check out the City of Bozeman ordinances regarding commercial lighting (if you can, wade through government-speak and understand all the exceptions). Do we really need flashing signs along North 19th when most businesses are closed at night?

- Get to know the neighbor whose porch lights blast into your eyes like a landing 747, and explain that his light is invading your space.
- Reduce the wattage in all your lightbulbs, indoors and out.
- Turn out the lights when they're not in use.
- Only use fully shielded light fixtures outdoors.
- Draw your shades at night.
- Remember safety. Try walking around in the dark with different light sources and see what works the best for you for seeing the longest distance at night.
- Stroll through darksky.org for even more ways to fight to the invasion of the star snatchers.

FUNKY-COLORED FLAMES

If you want to spruce up your spring bonfire sans the psilocybin, grab a packet of **Funky-Colored Flames** and let 'er rip. These whacky, color-enhancing crystals create a brilliant display of blue, green, and purple hues, turning your humdrum campfire into a blazing trip-fest of prismatic proportions. Just drop them on—discreetly, if you can—and watch your friends ogle the flames like stoners on the Fourth of July. \$5 for a box of three; available at Target and Wal-Mart. —MIKE ENGLAND

