

Get Wild: We don't have to say 'Bah! Humbug!' to holiday lighting

Martie Semmer



Vega, the alpha star in the constellation Lyra is pictured from Silverthorne during the 2022 holiday season.

Mark Laurin/Get Wild

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and there is much to be thankful for as we share this special day and night with family and friends. This Thanksgiving, let's give thanks for the beauty, serenity and peace that a protected nightscape has to offer. Let's give thanks for the natural darkness that is essential for the well-being of humans, wildlife and vegetation. And let's give thanks for the inspiration and wonder that we get from experiencing a sky full of sparkling stars — a treasure that is becoming ever more precious and rare as the world is overcome by artificial light at night.

With Thanksgiving, the holiday season has arrived. Traditional celebrations associated with the natural night sky at this time of year include Christmas, Hanukkah, winter solstice and many more. There are numerous holiday traditions around the world that are connected with the night sky.

Is there a conflict between the natural night sky of the holiday season and contemporary artificial holiday lighting?

NASA reports that the Earth is up to 50% brighter in the U.S. during the holidays. When NASA tried to gather data during the holidays from places with snow-covered landscapes the “snowglow” combined with holiday lighting was too intense to collect reliable data.

Citizen-scientists with the scientific research program [Globe at Night](#) find excessive holiday lighting contributes to negative effects on the environment as well as humans. Impacts on the environment include “washing out the stars, wasting energy, and disrupting nocturnal life.” While impacts on human health include “difficulty sleeping, headaches, and increased anxiety.”

Still, we don't have to say “Bah! Humbug!” to holiday lighting. Eleanor Stokes, a research scientist at the University of Maryland who has worked with NASA to gather satellite data on our lighting habits, remarks that putting your lights on a timer can have a “huge benefit.” She adds, “I'm all about being festive, but you don't need to be festive at, like, 3 a.m.”

Instead, we can follow [DarkSky Colorado-approved](#) holiday lighting tips to help protect our human and wildlife neighbors. Residents and visitors alike are invited to follow these holiday lighting tips:

Use fewer lights overall.

Avoid excessive use of lights that have a more blue appearance. Blue light is most harmful to wildlife and contributes more than other colors to

sky glow. If you use white lighting, select warmer lights that are close in color to a candle flame.

Control outdoor holiday lighting with timers and turn it off completely at bedtime.

Keep holiday lighting in season.

Amber, gold and red lights have a lower light wavelengths.

Additional guidelines to consider include:

Be vigilant that holiday lighting stays on your property with minimal sky glow.

Using window coverings and/or dimmers.

Keep indoor lights indoors.

LED or low-pressure sodium amber, gold, green and red lights have a lower color temperature, cause less environmental harm, and are gentler on night vision.

Avoid blinking/flashing lights and rotating colors.

Keep holiday lights off during the day.

Unshielded bistro or string lighting can hurt and impair eyesight for people and wildlife.

Before putting lights on trees, research the effects of light pollution on vegetation.

Limit holiday lighting to 60-75 days or less each year to preserve the specialness of the holiday season.

Enjoy the festive holiday lighting of our modern traditions. Likewise, take time to look up at the celestial lights of the starry heavens — the inspiration for many of our holidays.



Martie Semmer

Get Wild publishes every Friday in the Summit Daily News. Martie Semmer is actively involved with DarkSky Colorado and recently remarked the sky is the limit as she continues learning about and advocating for the preservation of the night sky.

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for dark sky information in Summit County.