



For Immediate Release – November 23, 2021

## **Top of the Pines designated an International Dark Sky Park**

OURAY COUNTY, Colorado, USA – The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) has named Top of the Pines (TOP) as the newest addition to the International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) Program. As such, TOP becomes the 6th IDA-certified Dark Sky Park in southwestern Colorado and the 10th in the State. TOP joins Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area, Slumgullion Center, and Hovenweep National Monument as other IDA-certified Dark Sky Parks in southwestern Colorado. TOP is also near the IDA-certified Dark Sky Communities of Ridgway and Norwood.



*TOPs star filled sky at night, photo credit - Val Szwarc*

“Top of the Pines has demonstrated their exceptional dedication and commitment to celebrating and preserving dark skies and serves as a role model to other parks and entities in this region,” stated Ashley Wilson, IDA’s Director of Conservation.

TOP is a 175-acre Recreation Area at an elevation of 8,650 feet in Ouray County above the Towns of Ridgway and Ouray in southwestern Colorado. This wilderness jewel owned by Ouray County but operated and managed by the non-profit Top of the Pines, Inc. offers local



communities and visitors a remarkable place to learn, recreate, and celebrate, while also providing an inspiring gathering place for everyone interested in exploring the beauty of San Juan Mountains by day or the truly pristine star filled dark skies at night. TOP's dark sky is documented to be among the darkest in Colorado as evidenced by its sky brightness measurement program. TOP's Dark Sky Park designation comes after approximately two years of efforts that culminated with an application submittal to IDA in August 2021. The application was prepared by the Top of the Pines, Inc. Board of Directors under the leadership of Board member Val Szwarc with additional significant contributions by the Board of County Commissioners of Ouray County, and local organizations including the Dark Sky Committee of the Ridgway Ouray Community Council, Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce, and local dark sky advocates. IDA's Dark Sky Park application process is rigorous and requires applicants to demonstrate an exceptional dark sky resource, initiate robust dark sky preservation activities, and provide public outreach and support for dark sky protection.

"We are excited and honored that IDA has elected to welcome Top of the Pines into the IDA Dark Sky Places Program," said TOP Board President Brad Wallis. "It's a significant accomplishment and TOP's Dark-Sky friendly policies will help protect and preserve its incredible star filled sky. I'd like to thank the County BOCC and the other TOP board members that made this possible."

The International Dark Sky Places Program was founded in 2001 as a non-regulatory and voluntary program to encourage communities, parks, and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through effective lighting policies, environmentally responsible outdoor lighting, and public education. When used indiscriminately, artificial light can disrupt ecosystems, impact human health, waste money and energy, contribute to climate change, and block our view and connection to the universe. Top of the Pines now joins more than 185 Places that have demonstrated robust community support for dark sky advocacy and strive to protect the night from light pollution. Learn more by visiting [www.darksky.org/conservation/idsp](http://www.darksky.org/conservation/idsp).

About the International Dark-Sky Association: The mission of IDA is to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting. Learn more at [darksky.org](http://darksky.org)

For more information about Dark Sky Places in Ouray County please visit <https://ridgwaycolorado.com/things-to-do/outdoor-adventure/dark-skies>. For more info about Top of the Pines and its Dark Sky designation, visit [www.topofthepines.org](http://www.topofthepines.org), email [info@topofthepines.org](mailto:info@topofthepines.org), or please call 970-316-3703.

###