



# Borrego Springs in California one of four world 'dark-sky communities'



A space portrait of the lower 48 states at night, showing their light footprint  
NASA Earth Observatory/NOAA



By [Terry Richard, The Oregonian](#)  
on December 17, 2012 at 2:48 PM

Seeing this photo online last week while on vacation made me happy I was vacationing in **Borrego Springs, Calif.**

An unincorporated community in San Diego County, Borrego Springs is surrounded on four sides by Anza-Borrego State Park, at 600,000 acres the largest state park in America.

The **community is one of four in the world** that have taken the steps to become certified as a Dark Sky Community by the **International Dark Sky Association**. Others are Flagstaff, Ariz., Isle of Sark in the Channel Islands of the United Kingdom and Homer Glen, Ill. (a Chicago suburb).

Certification primarily concerns how outside night lighting is deployed.

Borrego Springs has a population of 3,500 in its census designated area. It is surrounded by undeveloped park land and designated and undesignated U.S. Forest Service and BLM wilderness. The cities of the Coachella Valley, including Palm Springs, are on the other side of the Santa Rosa Mountains to the north.

Due to its small size and its surroundings, Borrego Springs would not have a very large light footprint regardless. But I was impressed that the community recognized that dark skies at night are a treasure worth protecting and have a plan in place that requires their protection.

The **accompanying photograph by NASA** shows that Borrego Springs is surrounded by light sprawl, which includes Los Angeles, Coachella Valley, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Mexicali and San Diego-Tijuana. Click on the NASA link to learn more about how the world shines at night.

Borrego Springs' dark spot on the map is just west of the Salton Sea and south of Palm Springs.

And yes, the skies really are dark out there, though you can see a faint glow to the west across the mountains that must be the southern California sprawl between LA and San Diego.

Oregon and Washington only have one place certified on the dark sky program, that being the Goldendale Observatory near Goldendale, Wash. It makes the dark sky "parks" list.

The most amazing lightscape on the map is western North Dakota, where the population is very small. Yet it has a light footprint nearly as big as Seattle and Portland combined because of the methane gas being burned as a byproduct of oil production.