DarkSky Festival

Big Spring - Van Buren, MO

October 17-18, 2025

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OUR PURPOSE

Our DarkSky Festival is an opportunity for people to enjoy and celebrate relatively unpolluted skies and learn about what light pollution cost us in our daily lives. Missouri has a few locations, such as Ozark National Scenic Riverways, that can remind us of what a natural night sky might have been just 200 years ago, but we are losing them fast.

You can help us protect our night sky and nature at night by getting involved in our DarkSky Missouri movement. Volunteer your time, spread the word, and help fund our work. Visit DarkSkyMissouri.org to learn more.

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Weather-Related Festival Updates

Festival plans may shift depending on the weather. We intend to proceed if skies are cloudy, but rain may require cancellation. For real-time updates, please visit our website at darkskymissouri.org or follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/darkskymissouri.

Event Schedule

The following Dark Sky Festival events are planned for October 17-18, 2025

Friday, October 17, 2025	
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Registration and Information Table Open
5:15 PM – 5:30 PM	Welcome to the Festival
5:30 PM – 6:15 PM	Program: Night Sky Talk Speaker: Shaun Heise, Interpreter at ONSR Join us for a captivating journey into the nighttime splendor of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR), where half the park comes alive after dark. This introductory program invites audiences to experience ONSR like never before—through the lens of its star-studded night sky. Presented by one of ONSR's regular interpreters, this program blends science, storytelling, and stewardship. Discover how the park's low light pollution creates ideal conditions for stargazing and discover the quiet beauty that blankets the park at night.
6:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Program: What We Will Be Observing Tonight and How to Observe Speakers: Amateur Astronomers Join a series of engaging talks led by passionate amateur astronomers as they share insights on what's visible in tonight's sky, offer tips for navigating the telescope field, and preview the evening's observing programs. Whether you're new to stargazing or a seasoned skywatcher, this casual gathering sets the stage for a memorable night under the stars.
7:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Self-Guided Tour of Observing Field
8:00 PM – 8:30 PM	Program: Constellation Tour Speaker: Bruce McMath, DarkSky Arkansas Join amateur astronomer Bruce McMath for an engaging journey through the cosmos as he showcases the celestial wonders visible in Missouri's autumn sky. From planets and constellations to deep-sky delights, Bruce will share expert tips on how to spot and enjoy these nighttime treasures—whether you're using a telescope, binoculars, or just your eyes.

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8:30 PM – 11:00 PM	Stargazing
Saturday, October 18, 2025	
Morning	
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM	Program: Nature Walk Leader: Katherine Bouska, Wildlife Biologist at MDC Step into the heart of Missouri's natural beauty on a guided nature walk through forests, riverbanks, and scenic trails. Along the way, you'll discover native plants, spot signs of wildlife, and learn about the delicate ecosystems that make this region so vibrant. Whether you're a seasoned birder or a curious explorer, each step invites connection, wonder, and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Program: River Safety and Dry Land Basics Speaker: Ozark Riverways Foundation Hosted by the Ozark Riverways Foundation, this practical program dives into the do's and don'ts of safe river recreation—on the water and on dry land. Whether you're launching a canoe or simply relaxing by the bank, knowing the fundamentals of safety can make every visit enjoyable and incident-free.
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM	BREAK/Visit Display Booths
Afternoon	
1:00 PM – 1:45 PM	Program: Hellbender Blues in the Ozarks Speakers: Loring Bullard, DarkSky Missouri Hellbenders, Missouri's largest salamanders, are in trouble. Because they breathe through their baggy skin, they live in cool, highly oxygenated water. For this reason, spring-fed rivers like the Current are their strongholds. Learn why hellbenders are disappearing and what we can do to save them!
1:45 PM – 2:30 PM	Program: Blinded by the Light, Artificial Light at Night, and Bats Speakers: DeAnn Gregory, DarkSky Missouri and Katherine Bouska, Wildlife Biologist at MDC This talk explores the growing body of scientific research on how artificial light at night (ALAN) affects bats. Acoustic monitoring technology, used to capture and analyze bat echolocation calls, is providing new insights of interest to the public in this fascinating field of study. Like other nocturnal wildlife, bats rely on darkness for navigation, foraging and other nocturnal behaviors.
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Break
3:00 PM – 3:45 PM	Program: Saving an American Treasurer – The Ozark Chinquapin Speaker: Steve Bost, Ozark Chinquapin Foundation Discover the remarkable journey of the Ozark Chinquapin—a native tree once on the brink of extinction. This presentation traces its historical significance, the

	devastating impact of chestnut blight, and the inspiring efforts now underway to bring it back to the forests of the Ozarks. It's a story of resilience, scientific collaboration, and conservation in action
3:45 PM – 4:30 PM	Program: Echoes of the Night Speaker: Don Ficken, DarkSky Missouri and Lights Out Heartland Every spring and fall, the night skies over Missouri become invisible highways for millions of migrating birds. To track their remarkable journeys, DarkSky Missouri has deployed acoustic recording technology—capturing nocturnal flight calls above the iconic Gateway Arch in St. Louis. Join us for a talk that dives into this innovative project and reveals how simple actions, like turning out unnecessary lights, can play a vital role in helping these winged travelers safely navigate their seasonal paths.
4:30 PM – 4:45 PM	Door Prize Giveaway
4:45 PM – 7:00 PM	Dinner Break
7:00 PM – 7:15 PM	Program: What We Will Be Observing Tonight and How to Observe Speakers: Amateur Astronomers Join a series of engaging talks led by passionate amateur astronomers as they share insights on what's visible in tonight's sky, offer tips for navigating the telescope field, and preview the evening's observing programs. Whether you're new to stargazing or a seasoned skywatcher, this casual gathering sets the stage for a memorable night under the stars.
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8:30 PM – 11:00 PM	Stargazing

Sign-up to get DarkSky Festival Updates

Information Tables

Information tables on display: Saturday, October 18, 2025, 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Organization	Website
DarkSky Missouri	DarkSkyMissouri.org
Greater Ozarks Audubon Society	GreatOzarksAudubon.org
Lights Out Heartland	LightsOutHeartland.org
Mark Twain National Forest	fs.usda.gov/mtnf
Missouri Department of Conservation	MDC.MO.gov
Missouri Master Naturalist – Miramiguoa	MissouriMasterNaturalist.org
Missouri Prairie Foundation	moprairie.org
Missouri River Bird Observatory	MRBO.org
Missouri Stream Team	MOStreamTeam.org
Ozark Chinquapin Foundation	stevebostocf@gmail.com
Ozark Riverways Foundation	Ozarkriverwaysfoundation.org
Ozark Society	OzarkSociety.net
Wild One St. Louis	STLWildOnes.org

INFORMATION TABLES AVAILBLE FOR ORGANIZATIONS!

If you need a table/chairs/canopy for the event, please let us know prior to the event. You can email us at darkskyfestival@darkskymissouri.org.

Accommodations

Fees - There are no fees to enter the park, and the event is free.

Campground information:

- Camping by reservation at www.recreation.gov
- 23 electrical only sites (no water or sewer) - $20.00 per night
- Dump stations available at campground entrance, water hydrants available at restrooms.
- Non-electric sites are $10.00 per night, all loops at campground will be available to reserve.
- Power is available at Big Spring Pavilion only at event site, with 3-220 outlets, and 3-120 outlets.

Multiple vacation rentals are available in the area with Vrbo and Airbnb.

Area motels include:

- The Rosecliff Lodge at The Landing
- Big Spring Road Motel
- Current River Inn
- Big Spring RV Camp
- Skyline Drive Vacation Rental

Restaurants

Some of the most popular restaurants in Van Buren include:

- The Blue Heron Restaurant at The Landing
- Redbeard's Steak and Seafood
- Jolly Cone Drive-In
- Float Stream
- Smalley's Convenience
- Las Margaritas
- Ranch House Coffee Shop & Creamery
- Cowgirl Cantina
- Godfather’s Pizza Express

More Information on Hotels/Restaurants

For more information on hotels/restaurants in the area, please visit the Van Buren Chamber of Commerce website at seevanburenmo.com

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Is there a fee for entering the park area or for the event itself?**

The event is free.

2. **Will there be food vendors? Will food or water be available for public purchase on Friday and Saturday?**

Water will be available at hydrants by bathrooms. We will have a big orange cooler with water to fill attendee water bottles. No water for sale. No food vendors are currently scheduled.

3. **What sort of tables/booths are you planning?**

Tables include DarkSky, Audubon, MDC, various river groups, Master Naturalist. Astronomy groups will provide demos and help with telescopes as needed.

4. **Will power be available at booths on or at the observing field?**

Power is available at pavilion, 3- 220 outlets, 3- 120 outlets

5. **Do you know what cellphone reception is like in the viewing area?**

Cell phone reception is spotty.

6. **Can we park our cars next to our telescopes?**

Cars won't be allowed to park by telescopes so that visitors can more easily go to each telescope. However, telescope operators can unload/load then go to parking area which is very close.

7. Do you plan any festival T-shirts?

We will have logo' d festival T-shirts available for sale at the event. A variety of sizes will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Only cash or check will be accepted. Sorry, no shipping is available.

8. What should the public bring? What should volunteers bring?

Public: Festival goers will need to bring chairs, ground cloth/blankets for sky viewing, insect repellant, sunscreen, food/drinks/snacks as there will be no food vendors at the event site. Please dress for the weather conditions, layers are best, with a reminder it will be colder than you expect due to being next to the Current River and Big Spring. Temperatures at the end of October can dip into the low 30's at night.

Volunteers: Volunteers at tables will need to bring tables/chairs/canopies. ONSR can provide if needed, however please let organizers prior to the event by emailing us at darkskyfestival@darkskymissouri.org.

Note to Everyone: Please remember this is a DARK SKY event. It takes twenty minutes or more to fully adapt your eyes to the dark, and any exposure to white light will erase dark adaptation in an instant. So, white flashlights, cameras with flashes, and digital devices, unless used in a night vision mode (red screen) are discouraged and asked not to be used. If you need to use a flashlight, please use a red or amber colored light, which can be purchased online or at larger retail stores. You can also adapt your flashlight by using red magic marker to color lens, or taping a red film over the lens

9. Any activities on Sunday?

No activities are planned for Sunday. However, please take advantage of this unique area. Visit the Van Buren, MO Chamber of Commerce website to learn more.

Other Notes from the Organizers

Food and Water:

- Food will not be available at the festival site, so be sure to bring your own provisions. Drinkable water is available at the festival site.
- There are multiple restaurants in Van Buren Mo, as well as grocery stores.

Dress for the Weather:

- Remember to dress for the weather, as temperatures can fluctuate at this time of year. Temperatures could range from 80-70's during the day, dropping into the 40's and 50's at night. And remember, temperatures are always cooler by the water, with Big Spring and Current River bordering the telescope viewing area.
- Remember to bring sunscreen, bug spray, chairs, blanket/ground for sky viewing, water and snacks, and a redlight flashlight to keep the night sky visible for all to enjoy. It takes 20 minutes or more to fully adapt your eyes to the dark, and any exposure to white light will erase dark adaptation in an instant.
- Red flashlights with lanyards will be available for purchase along with festival t-shirts, festival posters, and stickers, with cash and checks accepted, no credit card service available. We will also have red markers and red film available at the festival greeting table to adapt your white light flashlight.
- We will be watching the weather forecast closely, hoping for clear skies, but if cloudy weather prevails, we will continue our daily programs and provide an evening program at the Big Spring pavilion. More details to follow as we get closer to festival time!

Drawings:

- There will be a drawing with multiple door prizes for multiple winners, on Saturday afternoon after speaker programs conclude, so be sure to enter at the festival greeting table!

Ozark National Scenic Riverways – Information

Website:

Ozark National Scenic Riverways: https://www.nps.gov/ozar/index.htm

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 490
Van Buren, MO 63965
Phone: (573) 323-4236

Telephone Numbers:

Big Spring Entrance Station (located south of Van Buren, MO):

- Call (573) 323-4236.

Alley Springs General Store (located west of Eminence, MO):

- Call (573) 226-3945

Round Springs Ranger Station (located north of Eminence, MO):

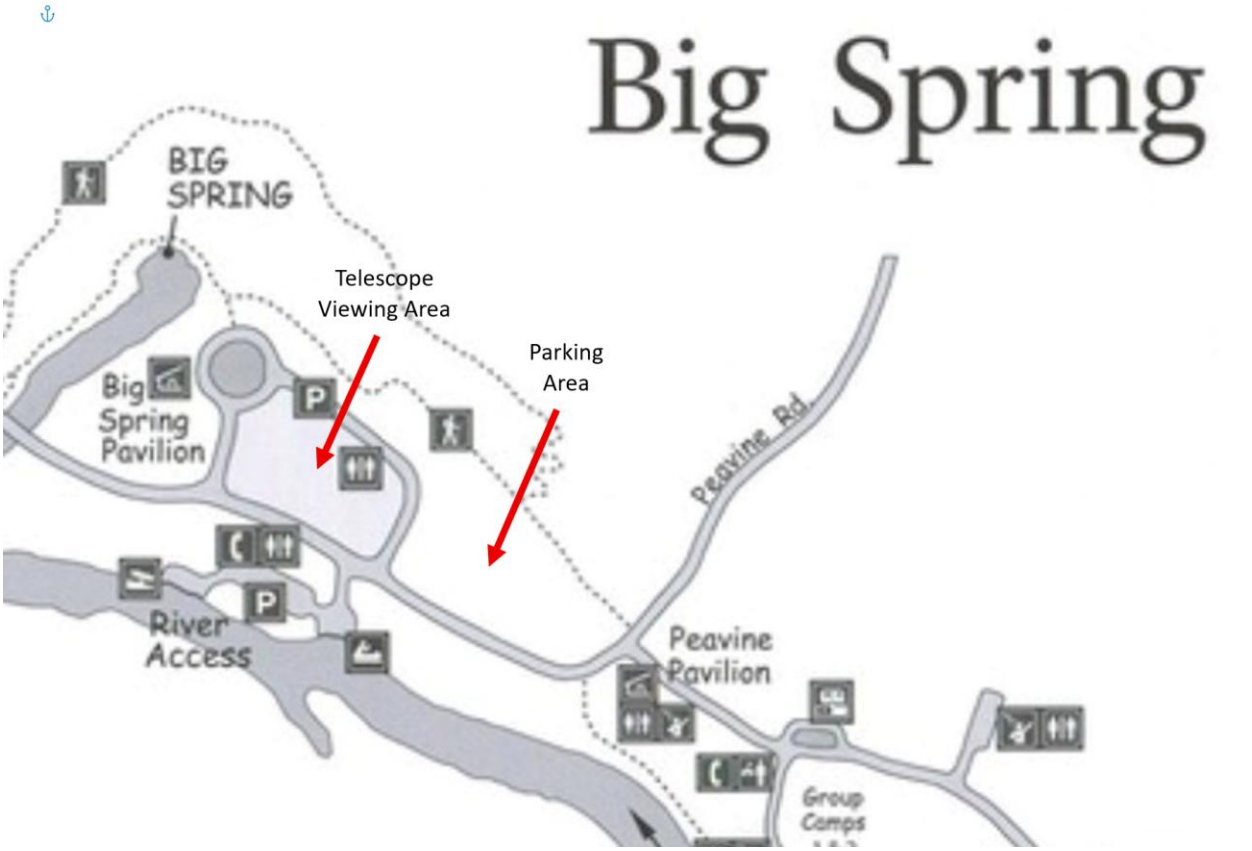
- Call (573) 858-3297

Map - Event Area

Link to event area: https://maps.app.goo.gl/MtF3P62iVGhCVxxQA

Map - Telescope Viewing Area

Link to event area: https://maps.app.goo.gl/MtF3P62iVGhCVxxQA



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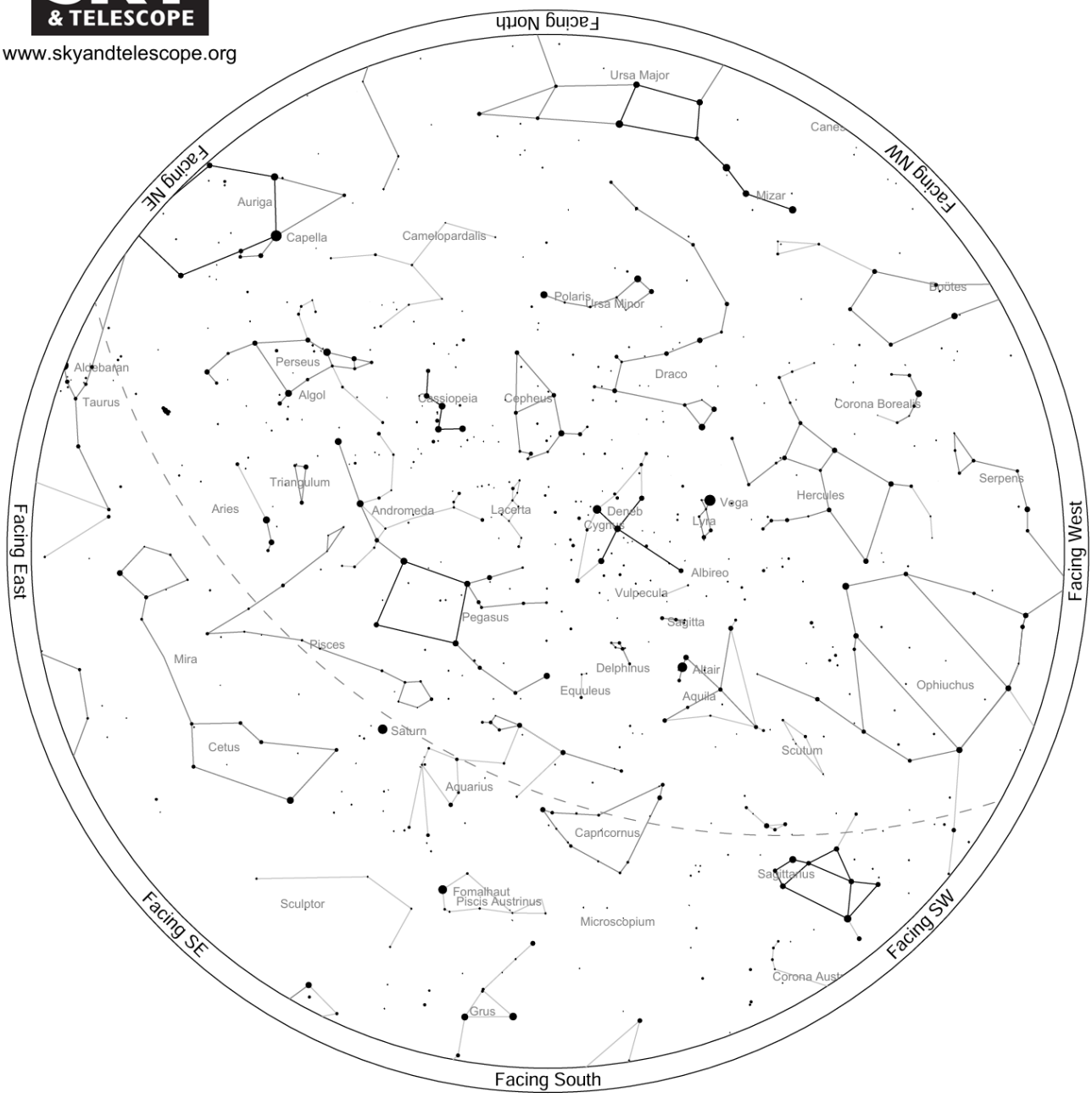
SKY & TELESCOPE
www.skyandtelescope.org

Sky Chart



Location: Van Buren, MO 63965
Latitude: 36° 59' N, longitude: 91° 00' W
Time: 2025 October 17, 21:00 (UTC -05:00)

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