

Dark Sky Etiquette

Welcome to the Fakahatchee! In case you haven't noticed, this area of the Fakahatchee is an abandoned quarry. It was used to produce fill for Alligator Alley when it was built. The excavations have long since filled with water, fish and alligators. Some of our members fish to pass the time before it gets dark. There is at least a 20 foot deep cliff surrounding all the roadways; one false step and you are swimming!

Although it can be tricky driving out here it does have major advantages for astronomy. All that water produces a layer of stable air, we have a good horizon, and the fish in the lakes provide a decent barrier against mosquitos.

While visiting the Fakahatchee there are some general rules to follow. This is state owned land, a part of the park system of Florida. All the rules of a state park must be followed. We are supposed to report park violations to the rangers, especially the ones regarding feeding of alligators. We have a permit that allows us to be on site after dark when the Fakahatchee is otherwise closed to the public. Club members who are regulars at the Fakahatchee can be provided a copy.

The most important single rule is a **prohibition of white lights**. An exposure of just a few seconds to a white light can result in a disturbance of your night vision (and your neighbors) lasting up to 40 minutes! Not to mention what happens to anyone performing astrophotography...

Dim red lights are the preferred method of illumination – red LED flashlights made for astronomy are the best ones. They can be purchased from an online vendor. It helps to have several stored in strategic spots in your vehicle as the flashlights can be hard to find in the dark. After stumbling around in the dark for years and continuously dropping stuff in my pockets on the ground, I just hang one around my neck. Some members wear them on their hats.

Two types of white lights are very troublesome to get rid of and cause quite a lot of disruption at times. One is your smart phone, and the other is your vehicle's internal lights. Both can be successfully dealt with but require pre-planning **before** you get to the Fakahatchee.

If turning off your smart phone isn't an option, and it's not for many people, you can check out our web site for links to instructions to dark-enable two popular types of cell phones.

<http://naples.net/~nfn19284/eas/Phone.php>

Failing that, there are red cellophane - like films that attach to your screen available for sale.

Vehicle internal lights are the worst offenders at the Fakahatchee. Every time you open your door or trunk the lights come on and stay on for a couple of minutes even after you shut them at once. There is often a way to turn them off, but it is likely buried in the instruction manual. The time to learn how is before you come out to the Fakahatchee. Failing that the other main option is to pull the fuse. A frequent visitor to the Fakahatchee might find the best long term option is to replace the interior lights with red ones. Suppliers can be located on the internet.

The only exception to the no white light rule is headlights; we don't want anyone to drive into the lakes! Just warn people before you leave. If you plan to leave early then park in a location that will have your headlights pointing away from the viewing area.

We also have a **bug spray rule**. Use as much as you want, but spray it **downwind** of all the telescopes. The reason being is that bug spray is about impossible to remove from our optics.

We just love to show children stuff through our telescopes! That being said, the Fakahatchee is not a safe place for kids under 10. There is just too much trouble or danger for them to get into unless they are watched every minute – which you can't do as it's too dark to see them!

The reason to have a star party is to do observing and so that we can do it together. If you wish to bring your own equipment feel free. If you want help setting up, just ask--you will find some volunteers. If you do not have your own equipment, feel free to visit with any person on the field and ask what they are doing or "What are you looking at?" In very rare instances you may run into somebody who simply is working too hard at something to take time to visit with you and have you look through the telescope. This is true for some astrophotography or other specialized observing. These things take a lot of concentration. However, most people on the field would love to have you look through their scope; just be friendly. You never need equipment of your own to attend a Star Party. If you are new to this, be aware that equipment should be handled with the same care you would give any fine camera. Generally, telescope equipment is not fragile and won't break when touched. However, since the optics magnify so much, a simple touch can disturb the view, and may even move the scope so that you cannot see the object.

If you have never been to a Star Party before, are visiting for extra credit in your astronomy class, want to know what kind of telescope to buy, are having trouble with your equipment, or whatever--just ask. Just as with any other group, we have some quiet and stick-to-themselves people. However, the vast majority of members are more than willing to share with you whatever they know. They will probably go on more than you asked for. The mission of the Everglades Astronomical Society is to "educate the public about the wonders of the night sky" We can't do that if you don't ask. First timers especially should attach themselves to somebody and simply spend the evening around them. If you would like such a mentor, just look around. The best candidates will already have a few people standing around looking through their scopes. Just join in!

Clear Skies!