



Programs and Events

Dark Sky Festival

Half the park is after dark! Join us for our 5th annual Dark Sky Festival! Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park is one of the few places in Southeast Minnesota where you can still see the Milky Way, meteor showers, and planets. This weekend is dedicated to enjoying the night sky through star gazing, telescope viewing, kids astronomy programs, celestial art, and special dark sky programs. Bring your red light flashlight, lawn chair, and curiosity. This event is made possible with the help of volunteers from organizations such as the Minnesota Astronomical Society, Rochester Astronomy Club, Starry Skies North, Driftless Dark Sky, Friends of the Yellow River State Forest, Luther College, University of Minnesota, and Winona State University!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16TH

3–4 p.m. So Bright! Solar Viewing with the Minnesota Astronomical Society

Meet at Historic Forestville

The Sun is a fascinating star to observe, and a solar scope can allow us to do so safely. Join the Minnesota Astronomical Society in the grassy field next to the big barn at Historic Forestville to safely view sunspots and solar flares. See the center of our solar system with your own eyes! Please note you should never directly look at the sun without the proper protection, as you can damage your eyes!

3–4 p.m. How High Can It Go?

Meet at Historic Forestville

Come on over to the grassy field next to the big barn at Historic Forestville to learn about the physics behind space exploration! Along the way you will be able to experiment with different rockets to see how high they can soar!



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3–5 p.m. Exploring Our Moon, Sun, and Solar System

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot

Join Dr. Andy Ferstl, Professor of Physics at Winona State University and safely look at our Sun through telescopes during the day! Dr. Ferstl will also have a scale model of our Solar System and some meteorites available for you to examine. Then take a 1-mile walk through a prairie field as you travel from the Sun all the way to Pluto and experience how big our solar system really is! The solar system walk can be done on your own and will be up from 3-8 p.m. Please note you should never directly look at the sun without the proper protection, as you can damage your eyes!

3–5 p.m. Star Art

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Come on down to the picnic shelter and let your creativity shine! Help us make a community galaxy masterpiece or create your own galaxy using crayons and beans! Feel free to draw or write about what dark skies mean to you along the dark sky chalk walk. Plus, build a star wheel to take home and enjoy during your own future stargazing adventures!

3–5 p.m. Safely View the Sun and Explore Its Wonders!

Meet at the William H. Morrissey Visitor Center at Mystery Cave

Discover the marvels of our closest star with the latest in solar observation technology. Whether you are an avid astronomer or simply curious about the universe, there are numerous tools and resources available to help you observe solar phenomena safely and in stunning detail. From sunspots to solar flares, the sun offers a dynamic display that can be both educational and awe-inspiring. NASA Solar System Ambassadors John Martin and Randy Hemann along with other amateur astronomers will show how to see the Sun using certified solar telescopes and filters to ensure eye safety. Come experience the power and beauty of the Sun like never before! Don't forget to bring your sunscreen – and your curiosity!



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3:45–7 p.m. Light Pollution with Starry Skies North

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Light pollution affects nocturnal animals and our ability to see the stars and other wonders of the night sky. Stop by the picnic shelter to visit with a volunteer from Starry Skies North – the local chapter of Dark Sky International – and learn about the impacts of artificial light at night, what it means for you, our ecosystem, and how simple changes can make a big impact.

7–7:30 p.m. Universe in the Park

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Join scientists from the University of Minnesota for an engaging look into the fascinating life cycles of stars— from their creation to their final moments. Let your curiosity take you through the cosmos and bring your questions about the stars that light up our night sky.

8–9 p.m. The Galaxy We Call Home: An Exploration of the Milky Way

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

We refer to the hazy band of light that graces the August night sky, stretching from Cassiopeia in the north, through Cygnus and into Sagittarius in the south as the Milky Way. But we also call our home galaxy the Milky Way. How are these ideas related? How did we come to understand what the Milky Way is and its place in the Universe? The visually stunning appearance of the Milky Way and the beautiful stars, clusters, and nebulae in the late summer sky provide the framework for us to tell the story of the galaxy we call home. Join Dr. Jeff Wilkerson, a Professor of Physics at Luther College, to explore our home, the Milky Way.



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Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park • August 16th, 2025

8:30–10:30 p.m. Star Party

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot

Come spend an evening under the night sky! Astronomers and stargazing enthusiasts will be there to help you explore the night sky, share stories about the constellations, and watch the Perseid Meteor Shower shoot across the night sky. The park and our volunteers will have telescopes set up so you can get a closer look at the stars and planets. Bring your questions and curiosity — all are welcome!



If you need an accommodation, please contact Dawn Ryan at dawn.m.ryan@state.mn.us or 507-808-8000, two weeks prior to the event.



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