



Programs and Events

Dark Sky Festival

Half the park is after dark! Join us for our 6th 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, Luther College, University of Minnesota, and Winona State University!

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21ST

7–8 p.m. Stories in the Stars

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

The sky is full of heroes, monsters, and legendary creatures across cultures and time. Join a pair of naturalists and discover how ancient cultures transformed the stars into stories that we still talk about today. After learning about the stories that dot our sky you will be able to make (and keep!) a planisphere or a star wheel to aid you as you seek the constellations in the night sky.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND

2–3 p.m. Make Your Own Star

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

To make a star you need quite a bit of hydrogen and gravity. So, how about you just use some leaves instead? Join a naturalist and create a leaf rub of your very own star while learning about the different types of stars.



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SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND CONTINUED

2–5 p.m. Scoping Out the Sun

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

That bright, burning ball of gas up in the sky is impossible to look at safely with the naked eye. So, join volunteers from the Minnesota Astronomical Society and safely view the sun with solar telescopes. Additionally, hands-on activities, coloring sheets, and a solar system scale model will also be available.

2–5 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.

2–5 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 just let inspiration shine and come create constellations and other night sky inspired artwork. Feel free to draw or write about what dark skies mean to you along the dark sky chalk walk.

2–5 p.m. Exploring Our Moon, Sun, and Solar System

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

Join Dr. Jennifer Anderson, Professor of Geoscience, and Dr. Andy Ferstl, Professor of Physics, from Winona State University and safely look at our Sun through telescopes during the day! Drs. Anderson and Ferstl will also have a scale model of our Solar System and some meteorites available for you to examine. Then take a half mile walk to 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 set up from 2 to 5 p.m.



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SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND CONTINUED

2–5 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!

3–4 p.m. Whooo's Out There in the Night?

Meet at the William H. Morrissey Visitor Center

Owls exist in the darkness while many creatures (like people) tuck in for the night. How do they do it? Stop by to check out some owl specimens and learn about how owls are adapted to the night.

4–5 p.m. These Summer Stars

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

What do a hero, a harp, and a swan have in common? They're all found far above in the summer sky. Join us at the picnic shelter as we explore the stories behind some of summer's most prominent constellations, from the mighty Hercules to the celestial Cygnus. Stop by at your convenience between 4-5 pm.

7–7:30 p.m. Universe in the Park

Meet at the Historic Forestville Barn

Join scientists from the University of Minnesota for a look into the exciting astronomy research that is being done outside our galaxy with the James Webb Space Telescope. Let your curiosity take you through the cosmos and bring your questions about what happens beyond our own Milky Way galaxy.



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Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park • August 21st & 22nd, 2026

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND CONTINUED

7–7:45 p.m. Star Story Time

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Discover the wonders of the cosmos and the creatures that inhabit our lands with us during family story time with Lara Fletcher of Starry Skies North. Families will also learn about light pollution, what it means for our world, and what solutions we are all capable of, even our youngest.

8–9 p.m. The Role of the Dark August Sky in the Scientific Story of Us

Meet at the Historic Forestville Barn

Humans have long looked to the dark night sky to help us tell stories of where we are, what we are and who we are. We will trace the history of the chemical elements important for life such as carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorous, from now back through the Big Bang. Objects from the August night sky – planets, nebulae and galaxies – serve as examples of objects that helped us deduce the details of this story. The dark night sky, rapidly being lost to light pollution around the globe, was essential to our unraveling this particular story of us, including playing a key role in developing the process of what we call science that made it all possible.

8:30–10:45 p.m. Star Party!

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trailhead 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 keep an eye on the sky for a chance to see some shooting stars. 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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