



BCT Stewardship Journal: July 2025

See the Night, Turn Off Your Light

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A third of humanity (and 80% of Americans) can no longer see the Milky Way. Even on clear summer nights on the Cape, light pollution from cities and homes seeps into the sky, stealing the night away.

Light pollution, according to Dark Sky International, is “the human-made alteration of outdoor light levels from those occurring naturally.” A byproduct of 21st-century industrial lighting and our desire for illumination, safety, commerce, and advertising, light pollution consumes our nights. It has led to the loss not only of the Milky Way that once reigned over New England’s August skies, but also of the constellations that became heroes of ancestral and cultural mythology, and of the experience of moving through darkness guided only by moonlight and meteor fires.

Beyond losing our night sky heritage, light pollution also has drastic effects on migratory birds, pollinators, mammals, sea turtles, and insects that conservation efforts strive to protect. Creatures like Atlantic salmon, monarch butterflies, and songbirds rely on natural light cues to complete their thousand-mile migrations. “Artificial light at night” (ALAN) creates confusing ecosystem cues that hinder migratory success since the process is dependent on natural light cues to guide migrators through space and time. Species like fireflies, coral, and treefrogs use light cues to time biological processes such as mating and reproduction. ALAN interferes with these cues, reducing reproductive success and population numbers.

Luckily, light pollution is the easiest form of pollution to address — it is reversible and simple for individuals to impact. The best thing you can do is assess and fix the outdoor lighting at your home or business. Consider following these five guidelines to maximize your lighting while minimizing harm to ecosystems:

1. Assess whether your lighting serves a purpose
2. Direct lights only where they are helpful
3. Dim lights to the lowest level needed
4. Put timers on your lights
5. Use warm-colored bulbs



Starry Night at Windmill Meadows.

Photo by Peter Schiabe.

Conservation stretches beyond our land and water — it reaches straight into our skies. We need to reimagine what night could look like. So let’s start this summer: turn off our lights, rediscover the joy of lightning bugs and good conversations under starlit skies, and change how we light the night.

To learn more about the opportunities of a dark night, follow the resources below:

[Dark Sky International](#)

[Mass Dark Sky Chapter](#)

[Xerces Society](#)

[Cape Cod Astronomical Society](#)

[Darkness Manifesto](#)

[Cape Cod National Seashore](#)