



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 11, 2010

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## Big Bend National Park News Release

### **BEST LIGHTING PRACTICES PARTNERSHIP EXTENDS LIGHTING BENEFITS AT BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK**

Big Bend National Park has recently completed upgrades to the exterior lighting at the Chisos Basin to reduce light pollution, reduce energy consumption, and provide better and safer illumination for visitors. The completion of the Chisos Basin work marks the completion of the second of four phases that will retrofit all exterior light fixtures within the park. The project is a collaborative effort with the National Park Service and a Best Lighting Practices grant with Musco Lighting. This Best Lighting Practices grant is administered through the National Park Foundation and the Denver Service Center of the National Park Service. The work was also funded by a grant from the Friends of Big Bend National Park and American Recovery & Reinvestment Act funds. Forever Resorts, Inc., contributed labor resources and made other donations to the project. The project is among the first of its kind in the National Park System in its scope and through this grant.

The Chisos Basin phase consisted of the retrofit of existing exterior lighting, including building and path lighting, with new LED (Light Emitting Diode) fixtures. The new LED fixtures utilize technology that provide comparable light with dramatically less electricity, have an average life of 50,000 hours and provide a natural moon glow color rendering effect. These new fixtures are designed to complement existing infrastructure, blend into the landscape, and are appropriately shielded, providing illumination where needed on the horizontal plane. The LED fixtures are less than 1 watt each and replace 60W incandescent and fluorescent lamps. The annual energy costs of lighting for the equipment that was replaced at Chisos Basin will be \$164 with the new system compared to \$3,293 for the old system. The project included the entire lodging area, restaurant, and amphitheater area. The path lighting between the amphitheaters and campgrounds at Rio Grande Village and Cottonwood has also been completed. The entire Chisos Basin phase results in a 98% reduction in wattage, energy consumption, and greenhouse emissions.

Big Bend has some of the best night skies in the country. The most significant source of light pollution in Big Bend was actually from light sources within the park. This project has eliminated this light pollution and significantly improved the quality of Big Bend's night skies. Prior to this project, visitors in the Basin could not see the spectacular night skies due to the spillover of the exterior lighting in the area. In fact, exterior lighting cast shadows on the mountains around the basin. Now, the night skies are clearly visible. The first phase, which re-lamped the exterior lighting at the Panther Junction Visitor Center and gas station, was completed in June of 2009.

Big Bend National Park is eligible to be an International Dark Sky park. The requisites for this are:

1. Good quality night skies
2. Demonstrated efforts to improve the quality of night skies
3. Interpretative programs on night skies.

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During a dedication ceremony, Superintendent William Wellman said, "This is a great project that we wanted to celebrate tonight. The amount of energy that will now be used to light the Chisos Basin is now a tiny fraction of the energy used with the old style lights. So from an environmental standpoint, and a sustainability standpoint, it's a really good project. You just do not get that many projects that have this wide a range of benefits. So I think this one is really worth celebrating." He continued, "We are proud to be working in concert with surrounding towns and agencies to improve the quality of the night skies in the Big Bend region."

Locally, the city of Alpine adopted a lighting ordinance in 2000 to reduce light pollution and is working on revisions to the lighting ordinance to further reduce light pollution. McDonald Observatory and Ft. Davis have long been proactive in reducing light spill in the Big Bend area.

For more information including a video and pictures of this project, please see the park's press webpage at: <http://www.nps.gov/bibe/parknews/newsreleases.htm>

The next phases will be the completion of work at Rio Grande Village, campground comfort stations, and the historic cabin area in the Chisos Basin.

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