

**Testimony of Mary Stewart Adams  
on H.B. 5414  
Michigan House of Representatives  
Committee on Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation  
13 March, 2012**

I am Mary Stewart Adams, Program Director of Emmet County's International Dark Sky Park at the Headlands and leader of the initiative that secured the designation nearly ten months ago in May 2011. It is a great honor to testify on behalf of the stars over northern Michigan, which are the same stars that shine over the whole state of Michigan and the same that shine over the entire Northern Hemisphere. Indeed, at this time of year, the constellation Orion the Hunter is visible in both the Northern and the Southern Hemisphere, and it is the only constellation that is visible the world over simultaneously.

It is my hope that each of the committee members has been able to witness the two great lights, Venus and Jupiter, as they make a brilliant conjunction among the stars of Aries, looking west 45 minutes after sunset at this time. And to the east, Mars is twinkling campfire orange among the stars of Leo, the Lion.

And I'd like to point out that I share all of this in order to suggest that the cosmos has set itself in finest array to perhaps support your decision on their behalf at this time!

Michigan has an enviable number of cultural resources that truly are institutions of our nation's heritage, including the historic parks in the Straits of Mackinac area, Sleeping Bear Dunes and the Henry Ford Museum, to name just a few.

I want to point out that I mention the Henry Ford not only because of the impact of the automotive industry on the global economy, but because of the remarkable relationship between Henry Ford and Thomas Edison, two great inventors of 20<sup>th</sup> century industry. Automobiles and electricity...

At the Henry Ford there are wonderful exhibits about the relationship between these two men, as well as a marvelous exhibit about early aviation, and how, through the use of electric light bulbs, communities across the country were able to assist early pilots in their cross country flights at night by fixing lights to the top of long posts that they would then shine up into the night sky. This was a gesture of support, a helping hand along the way while a fledgling industry developed. That industry did indeed develop, and pilots no longer rely on lights shining up into the night to find their way, and yet, light pollution and light trespass are rampant throughout our nation and throughout many regions in our own state. More than 2/3 of the population of the United States now lives where they can no longer see the Milky Way, and I ask you to consider, when we can't see the dark sky and share its stories and cultural impacts, what is it that we lose? The constellations, planets and stars have impacted every major religion; motivated every calendar across the globe; and influenced humanity's most remarkable, historical structures, most of which were built to align ceremony, celebration, research and even governance with the rhythm and mystery of the cosmos. Throughout history, some of our greatest works of art, poetry and literature stem from this same striving to know our place in the greater cosmic whole. A lack of places from which to experience a dark night sky, without the aid of research telescopes and institutes of advanced learning, presents us with a tremendous challenge.

The stars have been the source of inspiration for every age of humanity, from the most ancient of times into our own, but only in our most recent history have we been faced with diminishing starlight ~ and this because of our overuse of electricity. Where ancient cultures built pyramids and great stone monoliths to measure the movement of the heavens, modern man builds telescopes, satellites and spaceships ~ all out of the idea that it is possible to know the unknowable and touch the intangible. But while we are reaching further and further into space, we are at peril of losing more and more natural darkness here on Earth, which means we lose access to this incredible resource for the human imagination.

The only limits to experiencing the night sky in our civilized world result from light trespass, light pollution and compromised imagination. The State of Michigan has a unique history regarding the night sky, becoming the first State in the Union to designate a dark sky preserve at Lake Hudson in Clayton, Michigan through Michigan Public Act 57 in 1993. The area of NW Lower Michigan now under consideration as the State's Dark Sky Coast is naturally dark and without excessive artificial light, and because there is no battle about turning off the lights, there is an enhanced opportunity for demonstrating exactly what it means to be able to experience a truly dark night. The consequence to having a dark place to stand in our current culture is that from such a place, the level of conscience regarding the natural environment can be nurtured, ideally resulting in more environmentally-harmonious choices among those individuals exposed to the wonder and beauty of such a place.

The human being is capable of seeing about 10,000 objects in the night sky, but with the use of modern technology, over 900 million objects have been identified. This expansive exploration has not meant an increase in our capacity to know what's out there, and it has prohibited our ability to name what we have found. This results in a loss of connection with our environment and with former cultures, casting a long shadow over the stories that do remain, but which are no longer part of basic curriculum requirements.

The concept of a Dark Sky Coast is alluring because of the primal connection between all people and the night sky ~ one that continues to get lost in an over-lighted world. Already as home to one of only six internationally-protected Dark Sky places in the country, and one of only nine in the world, Michigan is a shining star on the map of an international community, which affords us the unique opportunity of stewarding and interpreting humanity's experience of the night sky in a way specific to life in northern Michigan, along the shores of the internationally unique Great Lakes.

From the response we've received since May 2011's designation, we are readying ourselves for the coming season to receive thousands of visitors of all ages from around Michigan, the United States and beyond. In the past year alone, the Dark Sky designation has been featured in every major media in the state of Michigan, plus Midwest Living's Best of the Midwest issue in January 2012; upcoming features of note include Everyday With Rachel Ray, AAA Living Magazine, and Bay Life Magazine out of Traverse City. As program director I work in collegueship with members of the International Dark Sky Association in Tucson, Arizon, consulting on cultural programming at Dark Sky Places around the world. From right here.

The beneficiaries of the dark wilderness we have established and which we hope to increase through HB 5414 are not only school children who are hungry for the stories of the stars, it is the general public, educators, indigenous peoples, wildlife, indeed everything and everyone under the stars. Through established and on-going educational programs, we are experiencing a longing and a demand for basic understanding of what's out there, in a culturally-rich way that is not too heavily weighted with science and technology, but which is also not prone to fantastic ideas regarding UFOs and paranormal, alien encounters.

Basic star knowledge and the resultant culture have a steadying effect in a world teetering on its axis with regard to economic affairs, global weather patterns, and international relations. From our corner of the world we seek to answer Thomas Carlyle's lament from Victorian-era England: *why did not someone teach me the constellations, and make me at home in the starry heavens, which are always overhead, and which I don't half know to this day?*

I come before you in strong support of HB 5414, for I believe as Greek astronomer Archimedes believed, that if you give us a place to stand, we can move the world.

Mary Stewart Adams  
Program Director  
Headlands International Dark Sky Park  
[www.emmetcounty.org.darksypark/](http://www.emmetcounty.org.darksypark/)  
231.838.8181