

Southern Maine Astronomers
Club Meeting Minutes
October 2, 2025 7:00 p.m.

Attending were members Michael Green, Russell Pinizzotto, Bob Dodge, Greg Thorup, Howie Marshall, Al DiSabatino, Anne Dobriko, David Feindel, George Bokinsky, Craig Snapp, Andrew Farm, Dean Ostergaard, Marc Stowbridge, John Saucier, Brian Perkins, Art Salve, Bill Denig, Stacie Daigle, Marc Snyder, Paul Schumann, Brett Joslin, Dave Manchester, guests David ____ (NHAS) and David Speltz (NHAS) and Rob Burgess.

Russ Pinizzotto opened the meeting by handing the floor to Rob Burgess who introduced our special guest, Nancy Hathaway, President of Dark Sky Maine, who introduced the film “Defending the Dark.” Nancy provided the history of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and her friendship with Roxanne Quimby (owner of Bert’s Bees), the donor of the 87,500 acres that became a national monument under President Obama. Nancy suggested to the group establishing the national monument that its dark skies were an asset worthy of preserving which then led to obtaining International Dark Sky Sanctuary status from Dark Sky International. Those efforts ultimately culminated in the formation of Dark Sky Maine in 2020 to work on light pollution statewide. DSM became an official chapter of Dark Sky International this year.

Dark Sky Maine (DSM) continues to promote responsible use of outdoor lighting to protect our night sky assets, through public educational outreach and advocacy in legislative and administrative forums. (Rob Burgess currently serves as a board member and Policy Committee chair of DSM.)

Mountains of Stars, an environmental organization based in NH and with close affiliation with the Appalachian Mountain Club and its Medawisla Lodge on the AT in Maine, commissioned Tara Roberts Zabriskie, a recognized filmmaker, to make a film about light pollution and the efforts to curb it in Maine. It is that film, “Defending the Dark,” that was shown during the meeting.

“Defending the Dark” can be accessed for free use and replaying from the DSM website (darksourcemaine.com) or from Maine Public’s website (which has shown the film several times over Maine Public’s TV network).

After the film there was a lively discussion about several aspects of light pollution in Maine among attendees. The film received high marks from viewers. Several members were moved by a speaker in the film, a Native American professor at U Maine, describing how in Wabanaki culture the stars represented the campfires of departed ancestors providing a guide for those who will follow, and how light pollution was erasing that culture. One guest reported that after the film he was inspired to again take up the fight with his Homeowners Association in Portsmouth, NH regarding their community’s outside lighting. Another member said he was going to show the film to his 10 grandkids at Christmastime.

Rob explained the many roles SMA has played in this effort dating back to 2008, and more recent efforts before the Legislature and administrative bodies, such as the Land Use Planning Commission. Others commented on experiences under truly dark skies getting lost in the abundance of stars when in a truly dark place. One member recounted life in the Coast Guard on drug interdiction operations in the open ocean when all maritime running lights were off and seeing an incredible number of stars.

The “neighbor’s offending light” was a common topic with a few success stories of simply raising the issue with the neighbor and having the neighbor turn off the light. Oftentimes a neighbor wouldn’t even know how far their outside lighting extends or who it affects. Rob informed the audience that the DSI website (darksky.org) has an inventory sheet for assessing the dark-sky-friendliness of one’s outside lights that can be a useful tool for making changes at home. The 5 Principles of Responsible Outside Lighting were reviewed to help all of us in making our own backyard environments dark sky friendly.

It was inspiring to see how a 28-minute film could motivate. Several members expressed an interest in showing the film at their local libraries to reach a broader audience.

Night Sky Tour - Russ Pinizzotto

Russ highlighted items from the NASA Observing Challenge for October and reminded everyone how easy it is to participate in the program. He urged everyone not yet participating to give it a try for the final three months of 2025. The targets for October were as follows: M2, a globular cluster in Aquarius; M30 a globular cluster in Capricorn; C22 (NGC 7662), the Blue Snowball Nebula in Andromeda ; C63 (NGC 7293), the Helix Nebula in Aquarius; C2 (NGC 40), the Bow Tie Nebula in Cepheus; C43 (NGC 7814) the Little Sombrero Galaxy in Pegasus; NGC 457, the ET Cluster or Owl Cluster in Cassiopeia; and Mu Cephei, the Garnet Star, in Cepheus.

Rob Burgess
Secretary, SMA