

2023-2024 Memorandum of Agreement

Between Sky Meadows State Park and The Northern Virginia Astronomy Club

The purpose of the Memorandum of Agreement is to outline the agreements between DCR/Sky Meadows State Park (hereinafter “Park”) and the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club (hereinafter “NOVAC”) governing the use of the Park by NOVAC for the purpose of providing public and NOVAC members-only astronomical observing sessions. This agreement shall be renewed every two years if both parties agree and may be terminated by either party with 30 days notice. NOVAC will assign an overall Program Coordinator.

The Park and NOVAC are committed to public education of astronomical knowledge, and the conservation of dark skies. The Park and NOVAC agree that the members of NOVAC be granted year-round after-hours access to the Park Dark Sky viewing area for the sole purpose of amateur astronomy observing and educational activities. This privilege is granted in return for NOVAC’s support of the Park’s public Dark Sky programming.

NOVAC’s Support of Dark Sky Programming

NOVAC is committed to supporting the park’s Dark Sky programming through members’ participation in programs and events, and willingness to share with the public access to their viewing equipment. Included, NOVAC is committed to supporting the Park’s pursuit and designation as a Dark Sky Park with the International Dark Sky Association. Support of Dark Sky programming is as follows:

1. Astronomy for Everyone Programs

- a. Monthly *Astronomy for Everyone* programs are hosted by the Park, and are open to the public. The monthly schedule, including program beginning and end times, will be established in conjunction with NOVAC and other program partners by November 1 of the prior year.
- b. During the program, Park staff will be present to coordinate and introduce all elements/speakers. Park staff will conduct the Junior Astronomer portion of the program. After formal presentations, the public will be encouraged to mingle and observe dark skies with assistance of NOVAC members until the conclusion of the program.
- c. NOVAC’s Program Coordinator must attend each session, or designate a substitute as needed. The Program Coordinator will communicate any substitute at least one week prior to the program. The Program Coordinator will ensure that all NOVAC members are approved for participation.
- d. Parking for participating NOVAC members will be in the designated area to the south of the split rail fence located behind Mount Bleak House/Visitor Center. Telescopes and associated equipment may be set up adjacent to vehicles, or carried and set up on the

north side of the split rail fence. No vehicles are permitted on the Mount Bleak lawn (north) side of the split rail fence.

- e. At the conclusion of the public session, the public will be asked to leave. NOVAC members who are state approved for after-hours dark sky viewing privileges may remain after the program for personal viewing/astronomy activities. NOVAC members who are not approved for overnight access are welcome to park next to the observing field on program nights during program hours, but must vacate at the conclusion of the public program.
- f. NOVAC will advertise programs and any other special observing events for the year through appropriate means (i.e., website, Facebook, Meetup, etc.). The schedule will include "Sky Meadows State Park" and park links for the program information. The Park will post programs on its web page as well as include them in media announcements and program brochures listing NOVAC as a cooperating partner. The Junior Astronomer and JPL presentations will be held rain or shine. The program may be cancelled due to weather by the Park management staff only. NOVAC will post the cancellation on their website. Every effort shall be made to provide timely notice to the public of cancellations.
- g. NOVAC members are encouraged to wear any clothing or insignia bearing the NOVAC logo.

2. Special Events

- a. NOVAC will oversee at least one special astronomical event scheduled at the Park each year. Park staff and NOVAC will mutually agree upon hours for public events based upon opportunities available by November 1 of each year. NOVAC will be primarily responsible for organizing these events and securing volunteers' help to administer the programs. One NOVAC member will be designated as liaison for each event. Park staff will promote the programs, prepare the viewing area, and work alongside NOVAC in administering these programs. These sessions will be open to the public who will pay a parking fee, if applicable. No fees will be charged to NOVAC members presenting an active membership card and assisting with conducting these sessions for the public.
- b. NOVAC and Park staff will work together, as time and resources permit, to offer additional astronomy related programs, e.g.: camps, classes, trips, etc. All details and proceeds of such programs shall be agreed upon by both parties.

Park's Support of NOVAC's Education and Outreach Astronomy Mission

The Park is committed to providing NOVAC members a dark sky viewing area for amateur/professional astronomy activities to further their astronomical skills and be better able to educate the public. The Park will provide nightly, year-round access to a designated viewing area for this purpose. Management of the program is outlined as follows:

1. After-hours Access


- a. NOVAC members wishing to access the park for after-hours viewing must pass a confidential criminal history background check administered by the Park. Interested NOVAC members will email skvolunteer@dcr.virginia.gov for the proper form. Park staff will notify the member and NOVAC's Program Coordinator when individual background check is cleared. Only those members passing a criminal history background check will be provided the monthly gate codes.
- b. The Program Coordinator is responsible for providing members a copy of the provisions and guidelines outlined in this agreement. All NOVAC members must understand and agree that access to the Park property after hours is a unique privilege, and agree to provisions and guidelines. NOVAC's Program Coordinator will keep a detailed list of who has access to the combination, and will produce this list when requested by Park staff.
- c. Members must possess their valid NOVAC Observing Pass at all times when in the park. Any individual unable to provide Observing Pass will not be permitted access. Members are permitted to sponsor (must be accompanied) immediate household members or up to two non-household guests per night. All guests must sign in on arrival, and are not permitted in the park without accompaniment by the Member. All non-household member guests must be 18 years of age or older and be able to present a valid photo ID upon request by Park staff. All guests are required to park in the observing field and follow all park regulations.
- d. NOVAC members will be provided a monthly gate code to enter and exit the park via the main exit gate, underneath the street light. The code will be changed monthly the first Tuesday of each month. Park staff will email the combination to NOVAC's Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator is responsible for the distribution to NOVAC members.
- e. NOVAC members agree to sign in with a sheet provided by the Park on the rear of the Contact Station on nights of viewing to track attendance and help tighten security on the site. The Park will provide the Program Coordinator a copy of the member login upon request for member participation tracking.
- f. Parking will be in the designated area to the south of the split rail fence located behind Mount Bleak House/Visitor Center. Telescopes and associated equipment may be set up adjacent to vehicles, or carried and set up on the north side of the split rail fence. No vehicles are permitted on the Mount Bleak lawn (north) side of the split rail fence. The entrance gate to the viewing area should be closed at all times.
- g. Parking and setup will begin no more than one hour before sunset to avoid impacting the general public's enjoyment of that area. If entering after Park closing hours, the park entrance gate must be closed and locked throughout the members' observing session.

2. Park Regulations and Emergency Contact

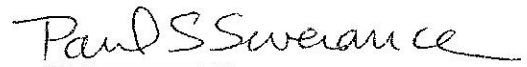
- a. NOVAC members shall adhere to all park regulations and provisions of this agreement when at the Park. Any individual members' negligence may be cause for the park's temporary or permanent suspension of the group's after-hours viewing privileges as outlined in this agreement.
- b. Drones, other unmanned aerial vehicles including remote control aircraft, and aircraft in general cannot be flown in state parks pursuant to 4VAC5-30-400.
- c. No loud radios or alcoholic beverages. Pets are welcome, but must be leashed at all times.
- d. NOVAC members will clean the area of all litter prior to departure.
- e. In the event of members requiring Park Ranger assistance, members may call the on-call Ranger at any time at **(540) 724-1037**. For medical or other emergencies, members should call **911**, and notify the on-call Ranger as able.

3. Other Provisions

- a. The Park reserves the right to suspend evening access without notice due to conflicts of use, emergencies or extenuating circumstances, though every attempt will be made to notify NOVAC well in advance of any such event. Members can expect extended periods of suspension in winter when the observing field is snow-covered.
- b. NOVAC shall provide the Park with a Certificate for Insurance naming the Commonwealth as a Certificate Holder, in the amount of no less than \$500,000 for General Liability, for any damages or injuries caused by NOVAC members while executing this agreement. The Park is self-insured for any damages or injuries they cause.
- c. NOVAC, and each individual member thereof, agrees to release the Commonwealth of Virginia, DCR, its agents, employees and volunteers from all action, damages, claims, or demand and all liability, which might be incurred during the conduct of this activity.
- d. Contact information for Park Management, NOVAC Program Coordinator and other pertinent persons is provided as an attachment to this document. NOVAC members will coordinate their contact with the Park through the designated Program Coordinator.


Kevin Bowman
Park Mgr., Sky Meadows State Park

12/1/22
Date


Paul Severance
Board President, NOVAC

11/15/22
Date

Other Contacts:

Erin Clark
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