

Joint press release of the Eifel National Park Forestry Office/Wald und Holz (Forest and Wood) NRW and the North Eifel Nature Park

## **The Eifel National Park receives final recognition as an International Dark Sky Park**

**State Minister for the Environment Heinen-Esser: the protection of the starry night sky serves the protection of health, species and climate and makes it possible to experience fascinating nature at night.**

**Schleiden-Gemünd/Nettersheim, 5 April 2019.** Experiencing the starry night sky with its sparkling celestial bodies is a special experience for a lot of people that is only possible in a few places in Germany. One of these places is the Eifel National Park. Since 2010, a regional initiative has successfully been campaigning to protect the night sky and preserve the natural night landscape. In 2014, it was awarded the provisional title of the first "International Dark Sky Park" in Germany. Now, this initiative can look forward to its final recognition as the International Dark Sky Park Eifel National Park.

At the observatory of the astronomy workshop "Stars without Borders" in the Eifel National Park, Dr Andreas Hänel, the highest representative of the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) in Germany, presented the certificate of recognition to the Minister for the Environment, Ursula Heinen-Esser, and the Head of the Eifel National Park Administration, Michael Röös. Recognition as a protected area by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) is an honour with which only a few regions worldwide can advertise; Germany has only four of them. For the Eifel National Park, which turned 15 this year, this honour is a nice "birthday present".

"Rarely does a topic offer so many win-win situations," said Minister for the Environment, Ursula Heinen-Esser, at the presentation of the certificate. She stressed the many benefits of protecting the starry night sky: "Dark nights have a positive effect on health and conserve resources, thereby serving climate protection. Above all, however, many species benefit from the darkness, as artificial light at night is a serious threat to biodiversity."

For North Rhine-Westphalia, the final recognition of the Eifel National Park as the only dark sky park in the entire western half of Germany is an outstanding honour. "The final recognition of the Eifel National Park as a dark sky park enhances our state's image as a nature destination," is how the State Minister for the Environment summed up the award.

The initiative was started by the astronomer and lighting consultant Harald Bardenhagen from Cologne, who managed to convince the region of the value of its starry sky. Bardenhagen initially found enthusiastic supporters in the Eifel National Park's administration, in the district administration of Euskirchen, the National Park towns of Schleiden and Heimbach, as well as in the executors of the Vogelsang estate. However, further efforts were needed at various levels before the final recognition as a Dark Sky Park: with regard to the design of outdoor lighting to reduce artificial light in the National Park and the surrounding villages or the development of tourist offerings so that

the general public could enjoy the experience of stargazing. The North Eifel Nature Park, in which the Eifel National Park is located, also contributed a great deal to this process.

Dr Michael Rööß, Head of the Eifel National Park Administration, thanked Mr Bardenhagen for his unprecedented commitment to combatting light pollution and his efforts for the protection and enjoyment of the nocturnal starry sky. "With the final recognition of the Eifel National Park as an International Dark Sky Park, we have achieved an important milestone in the region and, at the same time, played a pioneering role for the protection of darkness in North Rhine-Westphalia."

Manfred Poth, Chairman of the North Eifel Nature Park, stated: "We will significantly expand this unique selling point." With the innovative project application "Under the Starry Sky – the Eifel at Night", the nature park was able to hold its ground in the "Nature Park Competition.2021.NRW", launched by the Ministry for the Environment NRW, and, for the first time in its history, came first. "With the associated €400,000 in funding, the protection of darkness will benefit from significant further development through PR work, educational offers relating to sustainable development and tourism infrastructure projects in the Eifel," said Poth. Over 40 project partners, including the Eifel National Park Administration, wish to get involved.

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