SFAAA and SFWMD

SFWMD 2020-12-14 Recreational Forum

by
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SFAAA

- South Florida Amateur Astronomers Association, Inc. (SFAAA), FL inc 1966

- 501(c)(3) non-profit (1976) - amateur astronomy, education, and outreach

- Home is Fox Astronomical Observatory, Broward County's Markham Park

- Works with schools, libraries, scouts, general public, astronomy groups

- Member of NASA Night Sky Network

- Worked with NPS BICY to achieve their IDA dark sky certificate

- Provides a forum for like-minded amateur astronomers

- Observes from darks sites in the Florida Everglades (HC, BICY, DIR)

- Uses special use permits to access sites outside daylight only operating hours

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SFAAA and Dark Sites

- Harold A. Campbell public use area is the SFAAA's current primary site

- Amateur astronomers arrive before sunset, set up multiple telescopes with cameras and computers

- Once it is dark we take long duration pictures of one or more night sky targets (nebulas, globular clusters of stars, galaxies, comets, etc.) which can take many hours

- When done (may extend to sunrise) we take it all down and go home

- Group size varies, usage is ad-hoc based upon celestial targets and weather

- Our recreational activity is predominately single night use

- For multiple night use we reserve space at campsites (KSP, DIR)

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What SFAAA needs at Dark Sites

- Minimal recreational use requirements for amateur astronomy are...

  - Dark site away from cities, unobstructed view of night sky (not forest)

  - Passenger vehicle access (not ORV, not ATV, not 4x4s)

  - Nighttime access with no local hunting (avoids unsafe conflicts)

  - Open dry space (hard pack) to park vehicles and set up telescopes

- Optional facilities

  - Paved access road, paved parking area, mowing (site dependent)

  - Vault toilet

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What SFAAA does not need

- Amateur astronomy does not require...

  - Buildings, lights, electrical power (we use batteries or bring generators)

  - On site management staff for oversight or take supervision

  - Seasonal calendar management (our use is ad-hoc weather permitting)

  - Individual recreational license administration

- Minimal set of requirements makes amateur astronomy a favorable early recreational use activity for new managed sites

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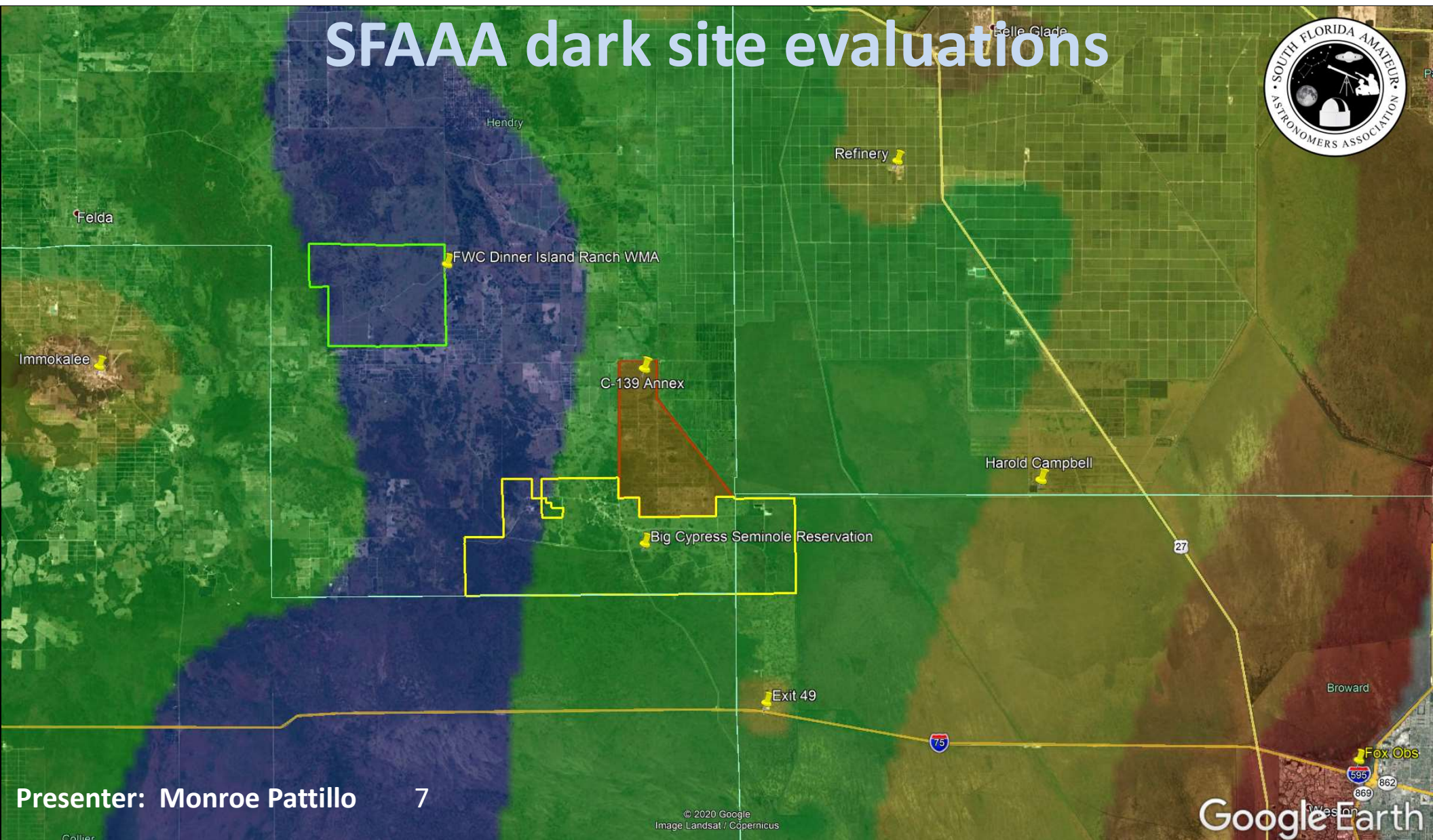Presenter: Monroe Pattillo   5

SFAAA dark site evaluations

- Urban expansion and associated light pollution drives SFAAA to take note of brightness of existing sites and to evaluate potential new dark sites on an ongoing basis

- We evaluate new potential dark sites using…

  - Google Earth, city lights overlays (rough, not current)

  - NASA ongoing night sky satellite surveys (better, more contemporary)

  - Exploratory visits to possible sites to… (most accurate)

    - Identify site darkness using sky meter at various angles

    - Identify specific light sources using mobile device theodolite app with data brought back and entered in Google Earth to identify

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SFAAA dark site evaluations

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How SFAAA can help

- SFAAA is a subject matter expert on amateur astronomy

- SFAAA works with SFWMD to coordinate special use permits for its recreational use (licensing per user not needed)

- SFAAA provides SFWMD liability releases to its dark site users

- SFAAA can help SFWMD identify light source issues with consolidated voice

- SFAAA can report back to SFWMD on managed dark site issues needing attention with a consolidating voice

- SFAAA can provide feedback on SFWMD future plans, responding to public announcements and proposals, participate in meetings upon request

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