

Our Night Sky for the week of July 23

As we all know, in the summer the days are long and the nights are short. You may not know, but there are three steps between day and night, Civil Twilight, Nautical Twilight, and Astronomical Twilight. These all are measurements of how far the sun is below the horizon and therefore how dark it truly is. There are many reasons for these precise measurements, some with legal implications and responsibilities for providing a safe environment.

It might surprise you to know that for several weeks in Prince George's summer we don't get any real night. The length of daylight and twilight is shortening every day past summer solstice by a couple of minutes. By the second of August we have exactly one hour of true night, for the first time since May 10th when we had 55 minutes of darkness on to the winter Solstice with 12 hours and 10 min of darkness.

There are three months that the skies are not very dark so if you have an opportunity with good sky conditions in the early fall or late spring don't pass it up. Otherwise learn to find constellations when the skies are at best gray. These constellations will help you to quickly find some of the beautiful sights in dark skies coming in September and October.