

State of New Mexico  
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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## News Release

April 2, 2013

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### **Leasburg Dam State Park Astronomical Observatory Grand Opening**

RADIUM SPRINGS, NM – Leasburg Dam State Park (Leasburg SP), the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) and the New Mexico State University Astronomy Department (NMSU) will celebrate the grand opening of a new Astronomical Observatory on Astronomy Day, April 20, 2013 from 6:00-10:00 PM.

“This is the third astronomical observatory in State Parks,” said NM State Parks Director, Tommy Mutz. “I am so proud to work with our partners to give visitors opportunities to enjoy and learn about New Mexico’s beautiful night sky.”

This observatory came about as a partnership between State Parks, ASLC and NMSU. State Parks contracted with Backyard Observatories, as well as B&D Industries for the utilities, and relied upon park staff for stuccoing and accessible pathways. Construction began in the fall of 2012.

The observatory building features a 12’x16’ Observatory Room, housing the telescope, with an adjacent 8’x16’ “Warm Room”. The roof over the observatory room rolls back off to allow the telescope a clear view of the sky. Total costs for the observatory building are about \$50,000.

“It has truly been an honor to work on this project and work with our partners,” said State Park Architect, Rob Vadurro. “I am looking forward to seeing my favorite night sky object, M13, through the new telescope.”

State Parks major partner in this endeavor, the non-profit ASLC, is dedicated to research and to providing public outreach regarding the importance of the night sky. ASLC has loaned a 16” Schmidt-Cassegrain Meade, research-grade telescope and additional equipment to the park for use in its observatory. The group will assist the park in providing training on use of the equipment, and will conduct research as well as public outreach programs and star parties.

“This observatory and telescope will provide folks with access to extraordinary views of objects in the night sky that are normally invisible to the unaided eye,” said Chuck Sterling, ASLC President. “Teachers, researchers, and the general public are encouraged to visit. Bring your students and your children; they will love it!”

Grand opening activities will include a “First Light” ceremony with a ribbon cutting at the observatory at 6:00 PM. Sunset will occur at around 7:30 PM and an observatory open house and an Astronomy Day Star Party will be conducted.

The observatory is a wonderful addition to the outdoor education programs offered at Leasburg SP,” said Park Manager, Evaristo Giron. “It is an honor to have the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces and New Mexico State University as our partners in this magnificent educational endeavor.”

This event is free and no entrance fees will be required for this event.

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How to get there: Leasburg Dam State Park is located 15 miles north of Las Cruces on I-25. Take exit 19, turn left on NM-157, and right on Leasburg Dam Road.

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