The McDonald Observatory in West Texas depends on the quality and darkness of starry night skies to conduct scientific research and educational forums on planets and galaxies.

The Observatory hosts approximately 100,000 visitors each year and is the second largest employer in Jeff Davis County.

In recent years, the increase of oil and gas activity in the Permian Basin has resulted in increased light pollution that threatens the dark skies.

Enter Bill Wren from the Observatory, who works with cities, counties, utilities and businesses to promote lighting solutions that safeguard dark skies and advance the health of wildlife.

WPX is working with him, too. In September 2019, we joined the Dark Skies Initiative and invited him to speak to our staff and service providers at an annual safety meeting attended by more than 300 people.

Lighting is important and necessary to WPX because our operations run around the clock 24/7, supporting worker safety and our ability to respond quickly if an emergency occurs.

Just two weeks after Bill’s remarks at our meeting, we implemented lighting practices endorsed by the Observatory and Texan By Nature at one of our compressor stations.

By year-end 2019, we made two more of our compressor stations in the region dark-skies friendly. This work is ongoing in 2020 and expanding to our salt-water disposal facilities too.

Additionally, we are in discussions with our drilling contractors and a joint venture partner in the basin about the feasibility of adapting these methods on the facilities they operate.