

Outdoor Lighting (2013, R2026)

Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects believes outdoor lighting plays an important role in the health, safety, and welfare of the natural and built environment.

ASLA supports:

- Lighting design that enhances the natural and built environment through placemaking, wayfinding, public safety and security, and aesthetics.
- Properly designed and maintained lighting that reduces light pollution and limits impacts on the environment by preserving and protecting dark skies, which are critical to support ecological processes.
- Lighting that minimizes blue-light disruption, preserves nocturnal behavior, reduces insect attraction, and maintains ecological balance in urban and sensitive environments.
- Best practices that promote increased lighting efficiency and reduced energy consumption.

Justification

Landscape architects play a crucial role in outdoor lighting design. As professionals, they are unique in their training, allowing them to integrate lighting holistically as a part of site design. They balance aesthetics and function, ensure safety and security, and reduce and manage light pollution, while supporting energy efficiency through proper fixture selection and placement.

Issues

Outdoor lighting has important applications in site planning and design that affect health, safety, and welfare as well as environmental quality. Proper lighting design is required for the safe use of roadways, pedestrian facilities, recreational spaces, and other outdoor areas when natural lighting is absent. A comprehensive approach to lighting design considers safety and security while enhancing the built environment, including the highlighting of cultural resources, monuments, artworks, and event and activity spaces by increasing useful hours of operation.

Improperly designed outdoor lighting can result in light pollution and the wasteful use of energy as well as artificial-looking and less pleasant landscapes. Changes in technology have resulted in light fixtures that help reduce energy consumption and improve color rendition. Trained professionals, including landscape architects, are often required by state and local codes to resolve many of the causes of light pollution from new and existing facilities.

Well-designed lighting enhances safety and security by reducing glare and visual clutter, minimizing contrast between light and dark areas, improving nighttime visibility, and eliminating shadows that can conceal people or movement.

Outdoor lighting may negatively affect health by causing light trespass, which disrupts circadian rhythms essential for sleep regulation, leading to sleep disorders and other health issues. Certain light frequencies and glare from outdoor lighting can cause eye fatigue and disorientation.

Outdoor lighting harms wildlife by affecting circadian rhythms, reproduction, food foraging, night vision, migration patterns, predation, and increasing mortality rates. Mitigation measures include specifying lighting with a color temperature (CCT) less than 3000 Kelvin (K), limiting lighting near nesting and breeding sites and water bodies, and utilizing appropriate seasonal curfews and controls.

Outdoor lighting can harm the growth and development of plants, including agricultural crops, by disrupting their photoperiod—the natural light-dark cycle critical to biological functions. Artificial night light interferes with plant health, flowering, and reproduction, while also affecting pollinators and causing wider ecological impacts.

Resources:

American Society of Landscape Architects. “The Sustainable SITES Initiative® (SITES)®.” *American Society of Landscape Architects*. n.d. <https://www.asla.org/sites/>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

DarkSky International. “What Is Light Pollution?” *DarkSky International*. n.d. <https://darksky.org/resources/what-is-light-pollution/>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

International CPTED Association. “The International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Association.” *International CPTED Association*. n.d. <https://www.cpted.net/>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

National Conference of State Legislatures. “States Shut Out Light Pollution.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*. Last updated March 25, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/environment-and-natural-resources/states-shut-out-light-pollution>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

National Park Service. “Light Pollution Sources.” *National Park Service*. Last updated May 15, 2025. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nightskies/sources.htm>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “The Multi-Sector Summit to Address Light Pollution and Bird Collisions.” *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*. March 15, 2024. <https://www.fws.gov/story/2024-03/multi-sector-summit-address-light-pollution-and-bird-collisions>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

U.S. Green Building Council. “Light Pollution Reduction Credit Guide.” *U.S. Green Building Council*. n.d. <https://www.usgbc.org/node/4918174>. Accessed May 7, 2026.

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