



NEBRASKA STAR PARTY PLANNER

THANK YOU FOR PRE-REGISTERING FOR THE 31st ANNUAL NEBRASKA STAR PARTY!

NSP 31 Dates:
July 28th thru
Aug. 2nd 2024

Please read this information packet carefully so you'll know what to expect at NSP this year, as of the date of its creation (early February). This packet contains preliminary information about the star party which you'll need to help you prepare. Remember that you can always find the latest and most accurate information, including frequently asked questions, on the web at www.NebraskaStarParty.org. When you check in at registration, **at Merritt's Boardman Campground**, you'll receive a packet containing Name Tags and a Program Guide with full details of the week's events.

IMPORTANT NOTES: ALL EVENT TIMES LISTED IN THIS INFORMATION PACKET REFER TO CENTRAL DAYLIGHT TIME. ALL PRICES QUOTED ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AND MAY BE SUBJECT TO SURCHARGES APPLIED BY CONCESSIONAIRES.

At A Glance

Things To Do EARLY:

- Lock in room reservations (see page 4) or...
- Plan your camping (see page 5).
- Sign up for optional meal service (see page 7).
- If you didn't order a Park Entry Permit when pre-registering, you may want to obtain one from a Nebraska state park near you, or online at tinyurl.com/btv9fcsy (see page 5).

Remember To Bring With You:

- Sunblock and a hat (see Be Prepared, page 6).
- Insect repellent – preferably *not* a spray type (see page 6).
- Warm (yes, WARM!) clothing for chilly night observing (page 6).
- Protective rain gear (see page 6).
- Canvas or plastic tarps for ground cover (see page 6).
- Spiral sand stakes, tiedowns, and covers for scopes (see page 6).
- Swimming apparel, aquatic sports equipment and fishing tackle.
- Submissions for the Astrophotography contest (see page 5).
- Quarters for coin-op showers and vending machines.
- Imaginative diversions for cloudy nights.
- Red filtered portable lighting (see Lighting Restrictions, page 6).
- Star Atlas and references for observation challenges (see page 5).

Health Care Preparations:

In addition to the above, consider the following as required.

- Your own bottled hand sanitizer.
- Your own disinfectant wipes.
- A fever thermometer to keep tabs on your party's health.
- Acetaminophen or other fever-reducing medication.
- Masks sufficient for each attendee for the week.
- Arrange with another attendee to mutually assist in the event of a sudden acute illness. (Must be able to drive.)
- Plan ahead for transportation into Valentine, if needed.

These suggestions will help keep everyone safe as the threat of widespread disease gradually wanes.

Eating There

If you didn't sign up for Sunday's, Monday's, Tuesday's or Thursday's meals with your pre-registration, it's not too late to change your mind. State regulations require us to make meal service pre-paid, but you can sign up and pay for meals at the time of check-in.

Getting There

Merritt Reservoir State Park is located on State Highway 97 in north central Nebraska's gigantic Cherry County, where it's a long way to the nearest quart of milk.

From southern points along the I-80 and I-70 corridors:

Take US Hwy 83 (exit 70 off I-70, exit 177 off I-80) north to State Hwy 97 just north of North Platte, NE. Continue north to Merritt Reservoir, approximately 100 miles north of I-80.

Alternatively, take US Hwy 281 (exit 184 off I-70, exit 312 off I-80) north to State Hwy 2 just north of Grand Island, NE. Follow 2 northwest to meet State Hwy 97 at Mullen. Turn north and continue to NSP's sign-in at Boardman Campground (see map on Page 2).

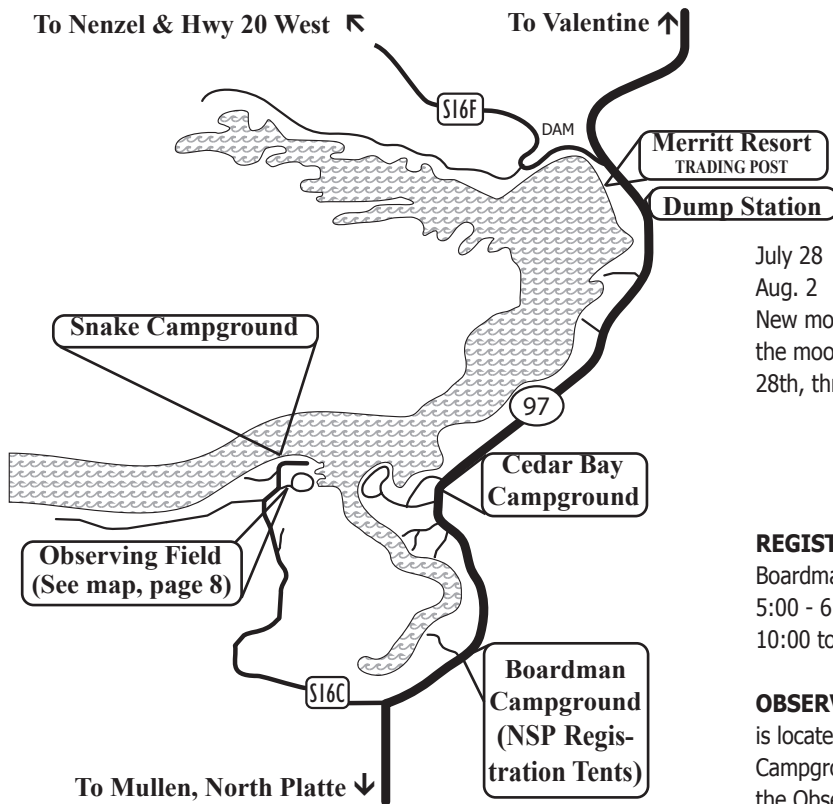
From northern points along the I-90 corridor:

Take US Hwy 83 (exit 192 off I-90) south to Valentine, NE, then State Hwy 97 south to Merritt Reservoir, approximately 110 miles south of I-90.

Highlights Of The Week:

SUNDAY	Registration/Check-In Begins; Optional dinner.
MONDAY	Field School; Optional dinner.
TUESDAY	Field School; Optional "Cattle Country" Burger.
WEDNESDAY	(At Valentine High School) Field School; Swap Meet; Speakers Program; Astrophotography Contest; Kids Program; Awards; Buffet Lunch available.
THURSDAY	Open day - Plan your own activities; Optional dinner.
FRIDAY	Open day; Public Star Party!

Door Prize Drawings take place at activities throughout the week. And of course, FABULOUS SKIES NIGHTLY!



Statistics

Observing Site Coordinates: N 42° 36'
 Altitude 3100 ft. W 100° 53'
 Central Daylight Savings Time is -5h from GMT

Sun & Moon:

July 28 Sunrise – 6:29 AM CDT Sunset – 9:08 PM CDT
 August 2 Sunrise – 6:35 AM CDT Sunset – 9:03 PM CDT

July 28 Moonrise – 12:32 AM CDT Moonset – 3:19 PM CDT
 Aug. 2 Moonrise – 4:15 AM CDT Moonset – 8:33 PM CDT
 New moon will occur on Sunday, August 4th, at 1:31 PM. During NSP the moon wanes from 45.5% of its disk illuminated on Sunday, July 28th, through 3.3% of its disk illuminated by Friday, August 2nd.

Where to Find:

REGISTRATION/CHECK-IN: Check in to pick up your materials at Boardman Campground. Check-in times Sunday are 4:00 - 6:30 pm and 5:00 - 6:30 pm on Monday and Tuesday. You may also check in from 10:00 to noon at Valentine High School on Wednesday.

OBSERVING FIELD: Referring to the map at left, the Observing Field is located on the south shore of the reservoir adjacent to the Snake Campground at the end of Recreational Road S16C. A satellite photo of the Observing Field can be found on page 8.

MEAL SERVICE: All meals will be served from the NSP Tent on the Observing Field near the entrance to "Dob Row". Due to a picnic table shortage you may wish to bring your own seating, or return to your telescope after picking up your meals.

TRAVEL TIMES: Count on 10 minutes travel time between the Observing Field and Merritt Trading Post, and an additional 30 minutes to hotels, restaurants and activities in Valentine, 27 miles to the north.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT CAN I EXPECT THE WEATHER TO BE LIKE? Changeable. The Nebraska sandhills are noted for that. While common temps range from the 60s in the evenings to the 90s during the day, past NSPs have seen nighttime lows as cold as 43 and daytime highs as hot as 105. Summer thunderstorms are common here, and are capable of bringing high winds and heavy rains. See the preparation guidelines on page 6 for recommendations on coping with the elements.

YOU MEAN I CAN LEAVE MY SCOPE SET UP AND UNATTENDED? OK, NSP organizers are not responsible for loss, theft, or damage to your property, got it? The lawyers make us say that. That said, large scopes should be safe to leave at the observing field, however you should take eyepieces and other small, dear objects with you. Oh ... and did we mention you'll want to lash that gear down while your gone?

CAN I DRIVE OUT OF THE OBSERVING FIELD AFTER I'M THROUGH FOR THE NIGHT? OH PLEASE, NO! If you're going to leave before sunrise, please park in the "early bird" lot, with headlights facing away from the Observing Field, and walk in. It's only a hundred yards from the lot to "Dob Row". Those who plan on leaving early will often set up their scopes nearer the early bird area to avoid long hauls.

BUT I CAN PARK ON THE OBSERVING FIELD? Absolutely, if you're staying through the night. But only in *mowed* areas. Please park so that you can pull straight forward to get out, so as to avoid flashing your backup lights at others. Note that automobile parking is prohibited on "Dob Row"; that's reserved for Big Dob Owners to drop their trailers.

DO YOU HAVE A BAN ON GREEN LASER POINTERS? Not at this time. We believe you'll use them responsibly. They're primarily used for educational purposes to point out celestial objects in the sky. For more, refer to Lighting Restrictions on Page 6. In general though, please restrain your pointing to only that required to ... well ... make your point.

WHAT IF I ARRIVE AFTER THE REGISTRATION DESK IS CLOSED? Relax, you're among friends. Settle in and enjoy the evening's festivities. Then you can just check in on the following day.

WHAT TIME IS IT, ANYWAY? Good question. Y'see, Merritt Dam and Hwy 97 marks the line dividing the Mountain and Central time zones, causing NSP to be scattered between 'em, depending on the event. So for consistency's sake, we've chosen to reckon everything, everywhere, throughout NSP in **CENTRAL** Daylight Time. Just because.
NOTE: Cell phones may not be able to make the correct distinction!

WHERE CAN I RUSTLE UP SOME GRUB? NSP's convenient evening meals will be served right there on the observing field. We hope you'll take advantage of this service. See the menus on page 7. For other meals, there are restaurants in Valentine, ranging from fast-food to sit-down, or if you have a cooler and a camp stove (note: charcoal may be prohibited if fire hazard is high) you can prepare your own.

HOW ABOUT GROCERIES AND SUNDRIES? The Merritt Resort Trading Post has limited groceries and daily necessities. But metropolitan Valentine has supermarkets, drug stores, and other shopping.

NSP Sponsored Events

THE NSP FIELD SCHOOLS: Beginners' Field School is held Monday through Wednesday to teach you how to make the most of your observing. Each day, classes focus on new skills that can be put to use that very evening. Beginners' Field School will be held at Valentine High School (see the map on Page 4) from 2 to 4 pm, CENTRAL time on Monday and Tuesday. The third Beginners' Field School begins at 10 am Wednesday morning.

FOOD SERVICE: NSP offers the convenience of optional evening meals served in the tent on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. These meals include entrée, sides, beverages and dessert. Meal cost is \$17 for adults, and \$12 for children 10 and under. Meal service will be held in the large NSP tent on the observing field. With picnic tables in limited supply, you may want to bring your own lawn chairs or take food back to your observing location. Due to state regulations, meals must be paid in advance at Check-In. See page 7 for menus.

EVERYBODY'S FAVORITE! – DOOR PRIZES: NSP is always showered with fabulous merchandise donated by many equally fabulous vendors. *You (or an immediate family member) must be present when your name is drawn to win.* Your name badge must be shown to claim the prize at the time it is drawn. If no one is present, the prize is forfeited and new names will be drawn until the prize is claimed. Drawings may be held at any of the NSP sponsored events throughout the week.

SWAP MEET: Cha-Ching! Unload that kit or those books you're no longer using. Find that elusive piece of gear that completes your collection. We'll meet and swap at Valentine High School on Wednesday.

SPEAKER SESSIONS: On Wednesday we all adjourn to Valentine High School to hear our guest speakers. Details of the topics and presenters will be in the NSP Program Guide you'll receive at Check-In.

PIZZA BUFFET: For your convenience, Pizza Hut will be at Valentine High School for Wednesday's events to provide a Pizza Buffet lunch. Cost will be approximately \$8 per person (subject to change).

CHILDRENS' PROGRAM: While the big kids are doing big kid stuff on Wednesday, littler kids will have a great time of their own! But shhhh... don't tell them they're getting educated. Crafts! Science! Lots of stuff to learn! School was never this much fun. There's no additional cost for your children to attend. The program is aimed at kindergartners through 7th grade. Mentors in 8th through 12th grades are encouraged to sign up to assist with lab activities for community service credit.

ASTRO PHOTO CONTEST JUDGING: You can help us evaluate the astrophotography contest entries. Just pick up a judging sheet near the photo displays outside of the auditorium at Valentine High School on Wednesday, and help us reward the effort that goes into creating the best of them.

PUBLIC STAR PARTY: What's more fun than getting together under dark skies with several hundred other friendly astro buffs? *Inviting the public to view, too!* Friday night's viewing will be an open invitation for area residents to really see and appreciate their dark little corner of the world the way we do. Don't forget that if you're an Astro League member you can count it toward the Astronomical League's Outreach Certificate! The public will be invited to meet on the Observing Field adjacent to "Dob Row" during the early part of the night, weather permitting, and then roam the field in search of friendly eyepieces.

NIORARA TRIP: While not an officially sponsored NSP event, we invite you to relax on a trip down the Niobrara River during the open days of Thursday or Friday. It's a relaxing way to chill in the cool, spring-fed water for a few hours. Information will be available at check-in.

NSP Rules & Regulations

SHARED FACILITIES: Merritt Reservoir and its campgrounds are public recreation areas in the Nebraska State Parks System, and are governed by the rules of the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission. While NSP makes every effort to avoid interference with the general public, we don't have the exclusive use of the area. There may be campers who are *not* part of NSP and don't follow our lighting restrictions. Your consideration and polite tolerance are requested.

PRIVATE PROPERTY: NSP events are held on readily accessible Nebraska State Parks property. There is private property in the vicinity of the Reservoir as well. Please respect all gates and fences you may encounter. By crossing these you will be in violation of trespass ordinances, whether posted or otherwise.

SECURITY: NSP organizers are not responsible for any lost, stolen or damaged items. Items left unattended are left at the owner's risk.

QUIET TIME: In deference to those who wish to observe into the wee hours and sleep in, please plan to avoid noisy activities in the campgrounds and on the Observing Field until after noon.

PETS: The harsh sandhills environment is tough on pets, so it's our recommendation that they be left at home. The observing fields contain dozens of tiny prickly pear cacti in every square yard, with barbs that can lodge in pets' coats. If you must bring them, pets in the camping and observing areas are required to be on a leash, and must not be a nuisance to others. Due to state health regulations, pets other than service animals may not be brought into the food service area during meal times. Cleanup after your pet is, of course, required.

CAMPFIRES: Campfires are allowed only in designated fire pits and grills within campgrounds. If fire risk is particularly high during NSP week, it's possible that fires may be banned altogether. No fires are permitted on the Observing Field. See the Fire Hazard notice on page 8 for details.

NAME TAGS: NSP functions are for the benefit of registered NSP attendees. Please wear your name tag whenever possible to identify yourself as an NSP attendee.

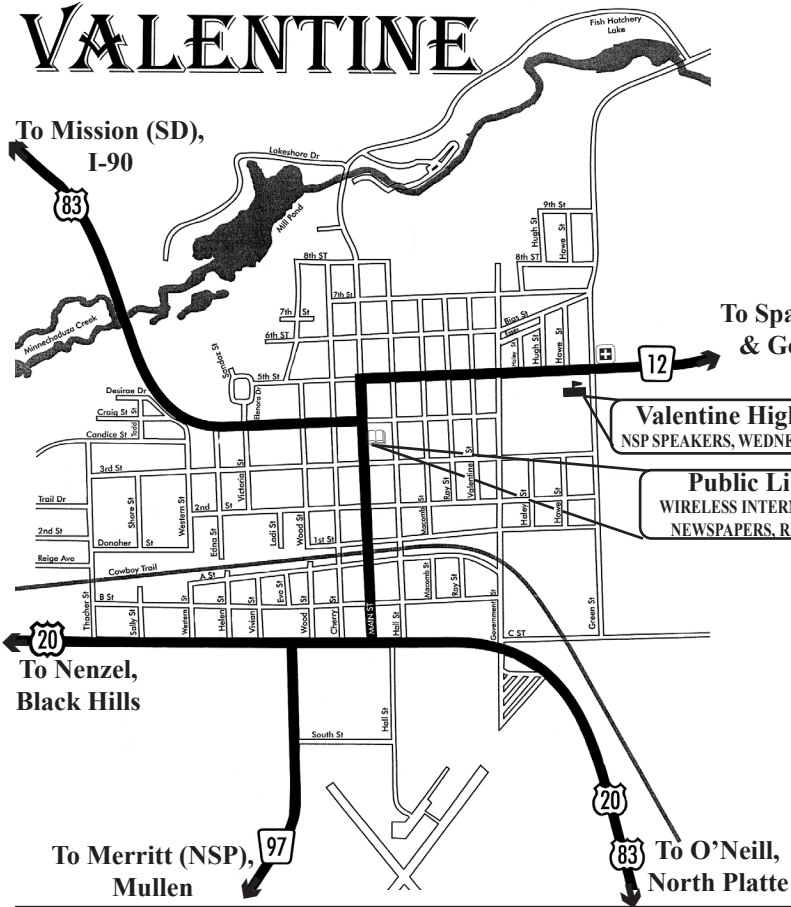
ALCOHOL: Beer and wine are welcomed in Nebraska's state parks. However we trust that you'll greet this news by treating your drinking with responsibility.

PARKING: Parking is permitted anywhere upon the extensive mowed areas of the Observing Field, however no vehicular traffic will be allowed on the Observing Field between the hours of 9pm and 5am (refer to Lighting Restrictions, page 6). If you plan to leave the area within those hours, please park in the designated "Early Bird" Parking Area (refer to the map on Page 8) and walk the remaining distance to your observing site. *No vehicular parking will be allowed on "Dob Row" except to load and unload;* this paved parking area is reserved for owners of large Dobsonian rigs to drop trailers and set up their scopes.

GENERATORS: The quiet serenity of the night is as dear to many attendees as the dark skies. Attendees with generators, either built into RVs or standalone units, should be considerate of other observers, and either select a more isolated location or restrict the operation of generators to daytime hours. An area to the southwest of Snake Campground has been designated to isolate generators from the central observing locations (refer to the map on page 8). Other locations distant from areas of congestion will also suffice. Please be certain that exhaust gasses from generators are not aimed in the direction of hay bales, mowing residue, and other potentially flammable objects.

LIGHTING: Lighting regulations deserve their own section. These can be found on page 6.

VALENTINE



Lodging Information

CAMPING: Information about primitive and trailer/RV camping at Merritt Reservoir is discussed on the next page. Below is a list of alternative lodging, including hotels, motels, resorts and RV campgrounds in the area.

ROOMS, RESORTS AND RV CAMPS: Hotel/motel rooms and Bed & Breakfasts are found in the city of Valentine, 27 miles northeast of Merritt Reservoir. Prices range from \$80 to \$170 per night. Also in the region are resorts catering to sportsmen and families where cabins can accommodate up to 20 persons. Many of these have RV spaces available, some with full hookups. **BOOK EARLY!** NSP takes place during the time frame when area lodging is in high demand due to the wildly popular Harley-Davidson festival in Sturgis.

SUGGESTIONS FROM VETERAN ATTENDEES: Campers who want more amenities or more shade may want to consider camping in one of the other Merritt Reservoir campgrounds identified on the map on page 2. Motelers who dislike early morning drives will often set up a small tent at the observing field for catnaps, changing clothes, and out-of-view (but unsecure) storage. However, if you're going to sleep on the field, either in a tent or in an RV, be sure to give the "Iron Ranger" (at Snake Campground) its due.

Hotels, Motels, B&Bs, Resorts, and Campgrounds:

NSP attendees are responsible for booking their own lodging. Hotels and motels in the area book up quickly, so you are urged to make your reservations very early for the entire duration of your stay. Some hoteliers offer discounts to NSP attendees, so be sure to ask at the time of reservation.

TYPE	NAME	LOCATION	PHONE	TOLL FREE
Resort	Alkali Fish Camp	On County S16B west of Hwy 83	402-376-1523	
Motel	Americas Best Value Inn	223 East Hwy 20, Valentine	402-376-1250	866-976-1250
Motel	Ballard Motel	227 S. Hall Street, Valentine	402-376-2922	
RV/Tent	Berry Bridge Campground	13 miles east of Valentine off Hwy 12	402-376-3474	
Resort	Boardman Springs Ranch	23 miles southwest of Merritt Reservoir	402-376-1498	
Motel	Comfort Inn	101 Main St., Valentine	402-376-3300	800-478-3307
Resort	Double R Ranch	25 miles south of Merritt Reservoir toward Mullen	308-546-2314	866-217-2042
Motel	Econolodge *	East Hwy 20 & 83, Valentine	402-376-3131	800-357-3131
RV/Tent	Fritz's Island Campground	7.5 miles southeast of Sparks	402-376-3708	877-700-3791
Resort/RV	Heartland Elk Ranch	17 miles east of Valentine, 2.5 miles south of Sparks	402-376-1124	
Resort	Lord Ranch Resort	On County S16B southeast of Merritt Reservoir	402-376-5984	800-270-0181
B&B	Lovejoy Ranch B&B	17 miles south of Valentine on Hwy 83	402-376-2668	800-672-5098
Motel	Motel Raine	West Hwy 20, Valentine	402-376-2030	800-999-3066
Motel	Niobrara Lodge **	East Hwy 20, Valentine	402-376-3000	877-376-3003
Resort/Tent	Niobrara River Ranch	15 miles east of Valentine on Hwy 12	402-376-6777	866-282-8677
Resort	Powderhorn Place	Hwy 20 southeast of Valentine	402-823-4270	
RV/Tent	Sparks Store & RV Camp	18 miles east of Valentine on Hwy 12	402-376-3119	800-337-3119
RV/Tent	Steer Creek Campground	15 miles northwest of Merritt on County S16F	308-533-2257	
Motel	Trade Winds Lodge	East Hwy 20 & 83, Valentine	402-376-1600	866-899-1600
RV/Tent	Valentine City Park	North Main Street, Valentine	402-376-2323	
RV	Valentine KOA	3 miles southeast of Valentine on Hwy 20/83	402-376-1162	
RV	Wacky West Travel Park	702 C Street, Valentine	402-376-1771	
Motel	Your Own Home	604 East 5th Street, Valentine	402-376-1662	800-376-1662

* Formerly Dunes Lodge and Suites ** Formerly Holiday Inn Express

Camping Information

PRIMITIVE CAMPING: Space for virtually unlimited primitive camping is available on the Observing Field. Primitive camping is defined as an open campsite with no amenities. Additionally, designated camp sites are available at the adjacent Snake Campground, as well as at the neighboring Boardman and Cedar Bay Campgrounds. The most popular camping and observing areas are indicated on the map on page 2. Primitive campers on the Observing Field, including RVs parked for sleeping, must pay a camping fee of \$15 per night. These fees are payable at kiosks located near campground entrances. The Snake Campground, along with the NSP observing field, has neither showers nor electricity available. Primitive campers may want to check Nebraska's Park Reservation System at tinyurl.com/poar9oe to ensure a space in any of Merritt Reservoir's Campgrounds. Vault toilets and potable water are available in each campground.

STATE PARK ENTRY PERMIT: Vehicles entering Nebraska State Park properties, whether camping or not, require an entry sticker which is valid for entry into any facility in the state park system. If you didn't purchase a sticker along with your NSP registration, you may buy one online at <http://tinyurl.com/btv9fcsy> or at the concessionaire of any Nebraska State Park. The cost of an annual permit for IN-STATE licensed cars is \$36; for OUT-OF-STATE licensed cars it's \$71. Also available at lesser cost are daily permits good for use on the day of issue only.

SHOWERS: Nice, clean, coin-operated showers (accepting only quarters) are available at Cedar Bay and Willow Cove Campgrounds. Showers are also available at Merritt Resort, 10 minutes north of the Observing Field. See the map on page 2.

TRAILER/RV HOOK-UPS: Electric hookups are available at Cedar Bay Campground, Boardman Campground, Willow Cove, and Beede's Landing, and at Merritt Resort, located at the east end of the dam. Contact Merritt Resort directly at 402-376-3437 to make reservations. A dump station is located near the boat ramp just south of Merritt Resort. See the map on page 2. The Valentine lodging info on page 4 lists additional RV and trailer-friendly spaces in the area.

Recreation Information

CANOING AND TUBING: On one of the open days many attendees enjoy a delightful trip down the picturesque Niobrara River. Through a special arrangement with Brewer's Canoers and Tubers (www.brewerscanoers.com) NSP attendees can reserve inner tubes or canoes at a discount. Bus transportation from their location at 433 East Hwy 20 in Valentine to the river and back is included in the rental cost of tubes and canoes. Tubes are put in further downstream than canoes so that everyone winds up at the take-out point at about the same time. Be sure to pack or purchase a lunch for the traditional stop at Smith Falls to eat. This activity is not directly sponsored by NSP.

FISHING: Merritt Reservoir boasts some of the finest fishing Nebraska has to offer. Annual fishing licenses cost \$38 for residents, \$84 for nonresidents. 1- and 3-day licenses may be purchased for \$10 and \$31 for residents, or \$14.50 and \$37 for nonresidents. Permits may be purchased online at <http://tinyurl.com/47ycf6xb>, or locally at the Merritt Resort Trading Post (with the addition of an agent fee).

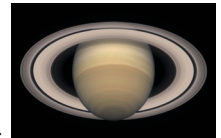
BOAT RENTALS: Fishing and recreational boat rentals are available at Merritt Resort Trading Post. Inquire at the trading post for rental rates.

GOLF: The Prairie Club, a semi-private facility between Merritt and Valentine boasts four challenging courses. Be sure to check out their website, www.theprairieclub.com for more information.

Contests And Awards

THE NSP ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST:

Certificates will be awarded, based on a vote among attendees at Wednesday's events at Valentine High School, for the finest photographs or CCD images in the following four categories:



- I. Wide Field** Low-power, wide field or piggyback shots of starfields or celestial groupings in the night sky, or weather phenomena.
- II. Solar System** Higher power lunar, solar, or planetary shots, including comets, eclipses, etc.
- III. Deep Sky** Moderate- to high-power images of deep sky objects.
- IV. NSP Shots** Only images taken at this or any past Nebraska Star Party may be entered in this category. Otherwise unrestricted.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST RULES:

- 1.** Only registered NSP attendees may participate in the contest. To enter, fill out the contest entry form available at the NSP Registration Desk during Check-In, and present it to the NSP Astrophoto Contest Chair PRIOR TO NOON, WEDNESDAY at Valentine High School. The entry must be properly mounted and ready for display, with only the entry number appearing on the front of the mounting, and full name, address, and picture details on the back. Entrant shall indicate on the entry form in which category the photo is to be judged. Due to display space limitations entrants are restricted to ONLY ONE ENTRY PER CATEGORY. Entrant may put information about the image (object name, film, exposure time, equipment used, etc.) on or next to the image, but may not put any information which might identify the entrant or photographer where it may be seen by judges. Each entrant is responsible for picking up his or her entries at VHS by 5pm on Wednesday afternoon, at the conclusion of the day's activities.
- 2.** Photos which have won an NSP award in previous years are ineligible for entry.
- 3.** CCD and webcam electronic images must be submitted in a hard copy, printed form for viewing without the aid of a computer display.
- 4.** Winners will be announced on Wednesday afternoon at the Valentine High School Auditorium following the last program presentation.
- 5.** Judging will be done at large by those in attendance prior to 2:00 pm. Judges will award points to their choices according to a prescribed schedule. First, second, and third place winners in each category will be determined by tabulating the points accumulated by each entry.

OBSERVING CHALLENGES:

We've prepared several lists of objects to find and observe. Certificates will be awarded to those who complete one or more of these observational skill challenges. Difficulty of the lists ranges from absolute novice to highly advanced (including children's challenges), with equipment requirements ranging from naked-eye and binoculars to 8-inch scopes and above. Special challenges are available for those with Go-To scopes. Details and rules will be available, along with lists that suit your skill level, at Check-In. A special ... and VALUABLE ... door prize has been set aside to be awarded to someone from among those attendees who have successfully completed one or more of the challenges! So be sure to turn those completed challenges in to our Observing Challenges Director!

Be Prepared

WARM CLOTHING? IN THE MIDDLE OF SUMMER??? Darn Right! Counterintuitive as it seems, the Nebraska Sandhills don't very efficiently collect and hold the heat of the day and re-radiate it at night. Typical summer nighttime temperatures drop into the 60s after daytime highs in the 90s, but temperatures dipping into the low 40s are not all that rare. Bear in mind that observing is a static activity, so even at moderate temperatures you'll require more warmth from your clothing than if you were active. Be prepared with layers of warm duds so that you can adjust as required. And don't forget your mittens. The general rule is to dress for weather about 15 degrees cooler than you expect to encounter. A good observer is a comfortable observer!

PROTECT YOUR EQUIPMENT: Apart from a rain coat, hat, and high SPF sunblock to protect yourself, you'll also need to consider protecting your scope from the elements if you plan to leave it set up. Consider bringing an inexpensive reflective mylar bag, or "Space Blanket", widely available at camping suppliers, to reduce heat buildup and dust during daytime hours. Although not marketed as waterproof, these will also protect your gear somewhat in the event of rain. Better grade scope covers can be purchased at NSP vendors' booths. And an inexpensive tarp for a ground cover is a must to protect against the numerous miniature prickly pears found on NSP's observing fields.

A MIGHTY WIND: By far, the greatest threat to your telescope is from wind damage should one of Nebraska's intense summer storms blow up. Fronts can appear suddenly and their passage may be short-lived, but they carry straight-line winds that can ... and do ... topple heavy scopes that are thought to be stable. If, when threatened, you're unable to take down your scope and pack it safely away, the next best option is to anchor it to terra firma. Unfortunately, terra firma is in short supply at NSP. All you'll find is sand, so you'll need anchors that are effective in sandy soils. Corkscrew shaped anchors, such as those used to tie down a large dog, work best in conjunction with rope or strong bungees. You'll also want to consider anchoring your tent in the same way. Don't plan on straight tent stakes being effective in the loose sandhill soil.

THE PERFECT STORM: Storms on the plains can move astoundingly fast, and pose threats of injury not only from straight-line winds, but from lightning strikes, flash floods and, rarely, tornados. Our Observing Field offers a vantage point from which a storm front will be visible on the horizon well in advance of its approach. As with any potentially dangerous situation, safety must be the first priority. In the event that a storm is headed our way, lighting restrictions will be lifted for the night, or at least for the duration of the storm. It will be left up to each individual to decide when to bag it for the night in order to have plenty of time to tear down, secure equipment against damage, and seek the shelter of an auto or an RV, or in the case of a tornado warning, lie flat in the nearest ditch or depression. Whenever a storm is imminent, safety concerns supersede lighting restrictions, and white lights may be used once you determine further observation is futile.

THINGS THAT GO CHOMP IN THE NIGHT: Nebraska's Sandhills, as with other places where water and grasses abound, host the inevitable biting insects such as mosquitos, ticks, and chiggers. Insect repellent is a must to reduce both discomfort and the risk of insect-borne disease. Sticks, balms, creams, or cloth applicators are preferred to spray repellants, as the chemicals in sprays can be corrosive to optical coatings. If all you have is spray repellent, be a good astro-neighbor and take the precautionary effort to walk 25 feet or more downwind of any scopes in the area before using it.

Lighting Restrictions:

The following rules regarding lighting are in effect within Snake Campground and near the observing field from twilight to twilight unless explicitly lifted by the Clear Sky Officer:

1. Be considerate; even very dim lights which might be fine at your normal dark site can be annoyingly bright here. This includes lighting within tents and shelters which are not perfectly opaque.
2. Lanterns, campfires, and other outside lights are prohibited.
3. Smokers must shield their lighters and cigarettes.
4. Flashlights must be equipped with red filters or bulbs.
5. Trailer and camper interior lights must remain off unless red filtered, or opaque material is installed on windows and doors sufficient to prevent light leakage from being seen from outside.
6. Vehicle headlights, parking lights, backup lights, and interior lights must remain off at all times. Please remove fuses or equip interior lights with red filters if you bring your car onto the Observing Field.
7. To park in the campground or on the Observing Field you must arrive no later than 9:00 PM and leave no earlier than 5:00 AM, CDT. No NSP traffic will be permitted north of the "Early Bird" parking area between those hours.
8. Those wishing to leave the observing area between 9 PM and 5 AM CDT must park in the designated "Early Bird" parking area with the front of the vehicle facing south, away from the Observing Field. Use only normal low-beam headlights or parking lamps to exit.
9. In cases of bona fide emergency, safety considerations always come first. The use of white lighting is justifiable and permitted.
10. Lighting restrictions will be lifted in the event of rain, or in the event of cloud cover greater than 75%. Upon the imminent approach of threatening weather, observers will have to gauge for themselves when to call it quits in order to have ample time to prepare for the arrival of a storm front. When a storm looms on the horizon, safety must be the first priority. The use of white lighting is justifiable and permitted to help secure equipment and find shelter.
11. Due to the public nature of the state park, NSP cannot enforce lighting restrictions among non-NSP attendees who may be sharing Snake Campground with us. Attendees are not to independently police these restrictions among non-attendees.
12. The responsible use of green lasers is permitted, as they are valuable tools for orienting beginning observers. Responsible use includes care in avoidance of targeting people, telescopes, and aircraft, as well as restraint with their use, as there is a risk of spoiling the images of astrophotographers. Please use them sparingly and only as required for instructional demonstration. Astrophotographers are to bear the responsibility of avoiding interference from laser intrusion on their photographs by warning neighboring pointers of the region of the sky being imaged. Requests from astrophotographers for cooperation must be honored by laser owners.
13. Electronic equipment is becoming more prevalent on the Observing Field. With it comes more annoyance from the screens of laptop computers, iPods, and cell phones, and power supplies which sport bright LED indicators. These extraneous light sources must be covered on the Observing Field, as even reflected light from screens is quite sufficient to cause neighboring observers to lose their night vision. Red hard plastic shields and soft plastic skins for laptop displays, MP3 players and cell phone screens are available from NSP vendors. Even though laptop screens are covered, don't forget that many laptops have annoyingly bright LED status lights which need to be covered as well.

Schedule of Events

(All event times are Central Daylight Time; Schedule subject to change)

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY/EVENT	LOCATION
SUN, July 28	4:00 - 6:30 pm 7:00 - 8:00 pm Dusk 'til Dawn	Registration and Check-In Optional Barbecue Chicken Dinner Observing Time!	Registration Tables, Boardman Campground NSP Tent, Observing Field Observing Field, Snake Campground
MON, July 29	2:00 - 4:00 pm 5:00 - 6:30 pm 7:00 - 8:00 pm Dusk 'til Dawn	NSP Beginners' Field School Registration and Check-In Optional Barbecue Roast Beef Dinner (Door Prizes!) Observing Time!	Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Registration Tables, Boardman Campground NSP Tent, Observing Field Observing Field, Snake Campground
TUE, July 30	2:00 - 4:00 pm 5:00 - 6:30 pm 7:00 - 8:00 pm Dusk 'til Dawn	NSP Beginners' Field School Registration and Check-In Optional "Cattle Country" Burger Dinner (Door Prizes!) Observing Time!	Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Registration Tables, Boardman Campground NSP Tent, Observing Field Observing Field, Snake Campground
WED, July 31	10:00 am - Noon 10:00 am - Noon 10:00 - 4:00 pm Noon - 1:00 pm Noon - 2:00 pm 1:00 - 4:00 pm 1:00 - 4:00 pm Approx 4:00 pm Dusk 'til Dawn	NSP Beginners' Field School Registration and Check-In Swap Meet Buffet Lunch (approx. \$8) Astro Photo Contest Judging Speaker Programs Childrens' Program Contest Awards & Door Prizes! Observing Time!	Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Valentine High School Building, 5th & Green Observing Field, Snake Campground
THU, Aug. 1	9:00 am - 3 pm 7:00 - 8:00 pm Dusk 'til Dawn	No NSP-sponsored events until dusk. Free Day to Explore Your World! Brewer's Niobrara River Trip for those who choose to take it today. Optional Marinated Pork or Chicken Dinner Observing Time!	Departs from Valentine at 9 am NSP Tent, Observing Field Observing Field, Snake Campground
FRI, Aug. 2	9:00 am - 3 pm 7:00 - 8:00 pm 9:00 pm - 12 Mid	No NSP-sponsored events until dusk. Free Day to Explore Your World! Brewer's Niobrara River Trip for those who choose to take it today. (Evening Meal is on your own) Star Party, Open to the Public	Departs from Valentine at 9 am Observing Field: Entrance to "Dob Row"

NSP Meal Service

Once again we're pleased to offer the convenience of evening meals served at the NSP Tent, located near the entrance to Dob Row on the Observing Field. Each meal includes a hearty entrée, sides, beverages, and a dessert. We hope you'll take full advantage of our on-site evening meal service on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

To comply with State Park regulations, we must pre-arrange service with the caterer, so meals must be paid for at registration or check-in. However, if you passed up ordering meals at the time you filled out your pre-registration form, it's not too late to change your mind! Simply email Coordinator Eric Balcom (ecbalcom@msn.com) and we can reserve your place in the serving line. Here's what's cookin':

SUNDAY: Barbecued chicken, with sides, beverages and dessert.

MONDAY: Barbecued beef on bun, with sides, beverages and dessert.

TUESDAY: "Cattle Country" Burger, with sides, beverages and dessert.

THURSDAY: Choice of marinated pork or chicken, with sides, beverages and dessert.

When you pick up the packet containing your name tags at check-in, you'll be greeted by our Meal Service Hostess, who will discuss reservation times between 7 and 8 pm. These reservations will be in 10 minute increments. We've found that this greatly increases efficiency and shortens the wait time for meals.

Paid-up meals will be indicated on your NAME TAG, so please remember to wear your name tag when going through the serving line.

Our meals are priced at \$17, with children 10 and under getting a reduced rate of \$12. And we're sure you'll agree that they're worth it! Bon appétit!

The Last Page

Registration & Administrivia

WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT OUR SPONSORS? NSP is pleased to have attracted vendors who make the trip annually to supply attendees with the tools we need to carry on. The NSP website (www.nebraskastarparty.org/?page_id=232) provides a listing of the companies who go to great lengths to bring their stores to NSP, and those who generously provide us with door prizes. We hope you'll let them earn your business when contemplating your next purchase.

PLANNING A PURCHASE SOON? Here's a suggestion ... you may be able to save a little in shipping by contacting one of the vendors who will be attending NSP and arranging to take delivery there. You'll have a wonderful environment for that "first light" experience, and the vendor gets a guaranteed NSP sale. A win-win solution if ever there was one! Check NSP's own website at www.nebraskastarparty.org/?page_id=232 to reference these links.

FIRE HAZARD AND BARBECUE RESTRICTIONS: Under normal conditions, campfires and charcoal cooking fires are permitted in designated fire rings within the campground areas around the reservoir. If the fire risk is particularly high during NSP week, open fires may be banned altogether and additional restrictions placed upon even charcoal fires in grills used for cooking. If you plan to cook meals on State Park grounds, including the Observing Field and adjacent campgrounds, be aware that bans may be placed on all heat sources other than LP or butane gas fired camp stoves. The fire hazard status will be posted on park bulletin boards. Please be prepared to observe the restrictions then in place.

IT'S ABOUT TIME! PLEASE NOTE that we've recently noticed a number of attendees who have had some confusion about what time it actually is. Blame modern technology! Cell phones and digital watches can automatically, and indiscriminately, change between Mountain and Central time in order to "assist" you. Please set your clocks and watches so that they lock to **Central Daylight Time** while you're at NSP.

NSP HEADQUARTERS LOCATION: Registration and Check-In will begin at Boardman Campground on Sunday (weather permitting) between 4 and 6:30pm, and continue on Monday and Tuesday evenings between 5 and 6:30pm. Boardman Campground is the first turnoff North of the Observing Field along Highway 97. Pre-registered attendees must check in to collect their name tags and badge holders, T-Shirts (if ordered), contest entry forms, Program Guides and other materials. You'll be able to pick these items up without having to wait for folks going through the longer on-site registration process. Got a question? Just ask anyone sporting a badge labeled "NSP STAFF".

Handy-Dandy NSP Contact Reference List

- NSP HOTLINE:** 402-491-3502 – Eric Balcom
402-333-5460 – John Johnson
- NSP Mailing Address:** NSP c/o Eric Balcom
P.O. Box 371
Boys Town, NE 68010
- NSP e-mail address:** info@NebraskaStarParty.org
- NSP Web Site:** www.NebraskaStarParty.org
- Prairie Astronomy Club, Lincoln:** www.PrairieAstronomyClub.org
- Omaha Astronomical Society:** www.OmahaAstro.com
- Nebr. Game & Parks Commission:** 402-471-0641
www.ngpc.state.ne.us
- Valentine Chamber of Commerce:** 800-658-4024
www.valentine-ne.com
- Brewers Canoers & Tubers:** 402-376-2046
www.brewerscanoers.com
- Deer Park Country Club, Valentine:** 402-376-1271
- The Prairie Club, Valentine:** 402-376-1361
www.theprairieclub.com

NSP OBSERVING FIELD: Attendees are welcome to camp and set up scopes anywhere the grounds have been mowed. The most popular observing areas are noted at right, along with the locations of "Dob Row", Snake Campground and its Pavillion, the NSP Meal Service Tent, and the Early Bird Parking area.

In general, the closer to the Dob Row wye an observer sets up, the more likely he is to welcome visits from strangers; those setting up far from the wye tend to be loners.

NOTE THAT NSP REGISTRATION IS AT BOARDMAN CAMPGROUND, JUST NORTH OF THE HIGHWAY TURNOFF TO SNAKE CAMPGROUND!

