



# Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

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## And the stars shine brightly on Lac Courte Oreilles

By Kathy Hanson  
Contributing Writer

The excerpt in the sidebar is one of Professional Photographer Steve Umland's favorites from the IDA organization, of which he is a member.

Most know Umland as the award-winning photographer that he is, with Minneapolis-based Umland Studios and a client list that includes Harley Davidson Motorcycles, Polaris, Jaguar, General Mills, Northwest Airlines, and Winnebago Motorhomes—that name just a few—that have garnered him over 180 local, national and international advertising awards.



Steve Umland shooting on assignment in Tuscany, Italy. Photo submitted.

In these parts Umland is also known by many who live on or near Lac Courte Oreilles.

Umland was introduced to Lac Courte Oreilles in 1984-85 by Kevin and Sue Horrocks, who were then account execs in a Minneapolis advertising agency.

He then helped one of his best friends, Jac Coverdale—also Umland's first Art Director in Minneapolis when he moved his studio here from LA—build a log home on Barbertown Bay. Several years later Umland purchased land on Victory Heights, overlooking Musky Bay, and designed his own full log cabin in 1999.

Umland's genius and passion for photography is rooted, in part, by his early and intense interest in the skies and space travel. He was in training for Air Force Intelligence aerial reconnaissance when Neil Armstrong stepped out on the moon on July 21, 1969. Umland then spent the years 1971-72 in Hawaii, climbing mountains and camping under the night skies—portending what would be the launch of his own photography career when he bought his first Nikon Camera in Hawaii in 1972.

He then went on to receive his formal training at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles and Pasadena, graduating with a BFA degree in Advertising Photography and Filmmaking.

"Photography is my passion, has been for over 40 years—my passion, my life, my love," Umland said. Like many artists, Umland's description of his craft is more emotional than system-based. When he speaks of his technique what you hear is less method, more poetry.

"I gravitate toward the right light. Light is everything in my photography. I call it 'sweet light.' That time of the day when the light speaks. Humans see in 3D.

Photography does not. The light must do what our eyes and brain do for us. Most people don't see. They don't look. They don't see our light or color. Photography taught me to look. To see what others don't," Umland said.

Much of what Umland "sees" is the night sky over Lac Courte Oreilles, a night sky that he says does not "disappoint." He keeps a telescope trained on the night skies and credits Lac Courte Oreilles for his buying his first telescope, which opened up the galaxies for him and posed a thousand questions in his mind about the color of the planets, the names of the stars, how the constellations got their names and the movement of the galaxies.

Digital technology has enabled him to do far more: photoshop, stack digital images, add and process astro images, piggyback the digital camera on the telescope. . . . (Perhaps you get the picture.)



This image is old school, shot with a Fujii panoramic camera and Velvia Fuji 120 film on Feb 3, 2007. The front glow on the trees behind our cabin were Christmas lights on front porch. (Talk about light trespass. Christmas lights put out a lot of light in every direction!)

Cabin itself has multiple exposures, turning on interior lights one room at a time for cabin. Average exposure for cabin was 15-30 seconds. Then all lights for cabin were turned off; camera sitting on a tripod on the ice. Last exposure was for three hours which captures the stars rotating around the north star Polaris. Camera was on a tripod so camera never moves. Photo and caption by Steve Umland.

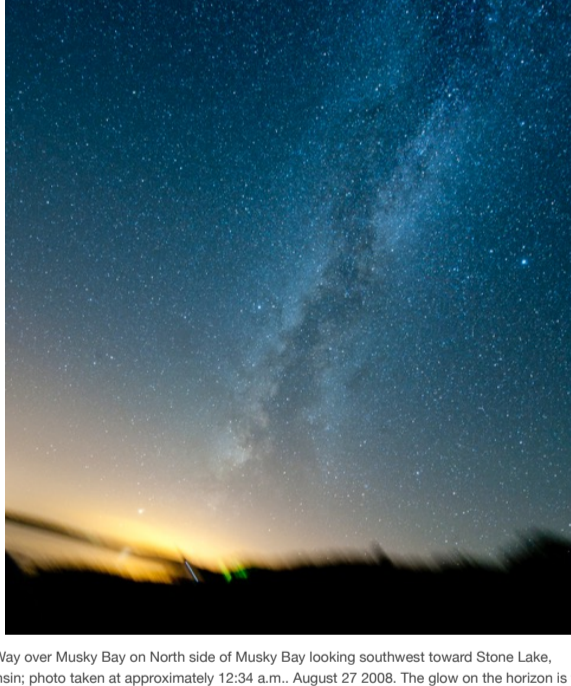
Umland said there are certain designated night sky locations throughout North America, most notably in the southwest, northern Arizona, New Mexico and western Texas.

"But ranked right up there is a small pocket at the center of The Flowage which includes Lac Courte Oreilles," he said, attributing the jet stream and the way it curves across the Midwest as factors for this good fortune.

But there is bad news: light pollution.

Umland said, "We are losing the ability to see the Milky Way and few Americans will be able to enjoy the view that we have here at the lake. Northern Arizona is a prime example. The Grand Canyon is an example. Traditionally one of the best sites, they are losing the night sky due to Las Vegas and Phoenix hundreds of miles away."

Just one street light or exposed bulb affects our ability to see at night, but on a moonless night a person can see thousands of stars here at the lake, he explained. Umland said in a photograph he took of the Milky Way over Musky Bay the light on the horizon is from downtown Stone Lake after midnight! Stone Lake is not very big, as everyone knows, but it has enough exposed lights to glow. If that were Hayward you wouldn't be able to see even half of the Milky Way, he said.



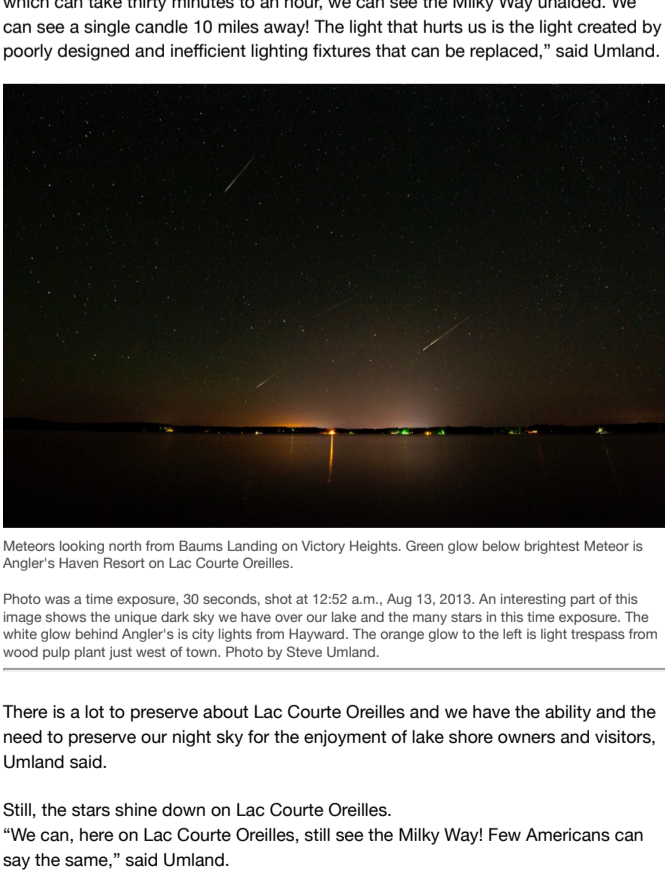
Milky Way over Musky Bay on North side of Musky Bay looking southwest toward Stone Lake, Wisconsin; photo taken at approximately 12:34 a.m., August 27 2008. The glow on the horizon is from street lights and business lights and is a good example of Light Trespass. Photo by Steve Umland.

Yet here in Victory Heights he has not seen an increase in light pollution—a practice he calls "Light Trespassing," when new construction goes up and people install light fixtures that shine upward or on adjacent or nearby property.

Umland said the rule in Sawyer County is that you should not be able to see an exposed bulb when approaching from the water. Umland explained that balancing the ability to see at night with the desire to preserve the beauty of the night should be the goal of shoreline lighting.

And the first principle of good lighting is to illuminate only what you wish to see. The solution is shielded lights that focus light down and not out. Dock lights, parking lot and garage lights, building lights—all of them are slowly decreasing our ability to see the stars, he said. Just one light on the stairs leading up to the cabin will reduce your ability to adjust your night vision from 6,000 to 3,000 stars, Umland said.

"We don't need all the lighting everyone thinks we need. Once adapted, (our eyes) which can take thirty minutes to an hour, we can see the Milky Way unaided. We can see a single candle 10 miles away! The light that hurts us is the light created by poorly designed and inefficient lighting fixtures that can be replaced," said Umland.



Meteors looking north from Baums Landing on Victory Heights. Green glow below brightest Meteor is Angler's Haven Resort on Lac Courte Oreilles.

Photo was a time exposure, 30 seconds, shot at 12:52 a.m., Aug 13, 2013. An interesting part of this image shows the unique dark sky we have over our lake and the many stars in this time exposure. The white glow behind Angler's is city lights from Hayward. The orange glow to the left is light trespass from wood pulp plant just west of town. Photo by Steve Umland.

There is a lot to preserve about Lac Courte Oreilles and we have the ability and the need to preserve our night sky for the enjoyment of lake shore owners and visitors, Umland said.

Still, the stars shine down on Lac Courte Oreilles. "We can, here on Lac Courte Oreilles, still see the Milky Way! Few Americans can say the same," said Umland.

On October 8, just a few days from now, Steve Umland will marry his fiancé Kathleen on the shores of Lac Courte Oreilles, under the stars. Jupiter, the largest planet in the Solar System, is supposed to shine brightly that night.

Note: Information on the International Dark-Sky Association is available [here](#) and [here](#). More Umland high-resolution photos: [Polaris](#), [Orion Nebula](#), [Meteor Shower](#), [Milky Way 1](#), [Milky Way 2](#), [Milky Way](#), [3](#), [Moon](#).

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**COLA Mission:** 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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"Many of us can remember sitting on a dock on a crystal clear summer night, the water flat as glass, the inky black surface mirroring the sky, the great Milky Way, a falling star tracing a path across the heavens.

Unfortunately, this precious part of our heritage, the outdoors with only the light of the moon and stars, is fading away. Dusk-to-dawn lights obscure our view of constellations, meteor showers, planets, and the landscape lit by the moon. The fading away of the night sky is an issue not only in cities, but also in the countryside and in developing waterfront communities."

--From the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), "Sensible Shoreland Lighting"

### IN THE NEWS

[COLA and LCO Tribe ask Judge to Review DNR Denial on Phosphorus](#)

Sawyer County Record  
June 22, 2016

### RECENT PRESS RELEASES

[Lake Association and LCO Tribe Proceed with Legal Action to Protect Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

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