



# DESERT SKY

## Presidents Message - May, 2008

One of the very best celestial objects is M51, the Whirlpool Galaxy. It can be viewed anytime of the year because it is a "near polar" target. In May it's easier to observe because it's in its Southernmost position, which is just South of the end star of the Big Dipper's handle. The distance to M51 is believed to be 27 million light years.

The Whirlpool Galaxy was first believed to be a "Double Nebula", but in 1830 Astronomer John Herschel speculated that it might be a "ring of stars" like our galaxy, but such objects were still considered to be "Nebulas". In the 1920's Edwin Hubble determined they were "Galaxies" outside our own Milky Way.

You'll need a dark sky and a fairly large aperture, 8 or more inches, to resolve the spirals of this galaxy. M51 appears to be a double spiral because there is a smaller spiral of stars that seems to be clinging to its outer reaches. However, the smaller spiral is not connected to M51, rather it's a separate galaxy beyond M51. The Whirlpool's long spiral arm lays in front of the smaller galaxy, giving the impression that the two are connected. Astronomers believe that the two galaxies once had a close encounter, but are now moving apart.

We've taken many images of M51 at the Observatory both in monochrome and color, using all three of the large telescopes. Drop by the Observatory during a Saturday Star Party and we'll image M51 for you!!

Mike Thomas

April 15th Minutes

Mike Thomas called the April WNAS meeting to order at 7:10 pm, there were twelve members and guests in attendance. Mike opened the meeting with a few notes on new astronomical events and a website he found that could be very beneficial to the JCDO's commitment to find extrasolar planets. Brian Guerin gave the treasury report (\$3,627.98) and the March meeting minutes were approved.

Robert Collier (Directory of JCDO & WNAS VP) presented a request by the Forest Service to have some WNAS members/volunteers attend this summers Forest Service star parties in So. Lake Tahoe. Discussion on this request will continue at the WNAS/JCDO Saturday night star parties. Robert also put forth a motion to continue the two \$500.00 scholarship grants to WNC students this spring. This would be similar to the scholarships presented last year. The motion was seconded by John Sousa and Brian Guerin. A majority of members than voted by voice to pass the motion.

Gerald Brandevold reported that several observatory software problems have been resolved. Gerald also initialized the new Celestron CGE mount and mounted/balanced the 11" Celestron telescope on the CGE.

It was noted by all that the light blocking wall has finally been completed and provides the exact effect we all hoped for. Many thanks goes to the WNAS and WNC for making this project possible.

Frank Davis presented a short video and Red Sumner brought up the subject of Astronomy Day and whether WNAS members wanted to make any special plans such as telescopes around town. Discussion on Astronomy Day events was deferred for discussion at the regular Saturday night star parties.

The business portion of the WNAS meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm. This was followed by an excellent lecture on the life of Wyatt Earp by Mike Thomas.

**Next WNAS General Membership Meeting - Tuesday May 20th @ 7:00 PM**

**May WNAS Membership Meeting GUEST SPEAKER!!**

Aero Space Engineer Jim Spradley will present a lecture on "Boeing's Role in Space Vehicle Development"

### WNAS Officers

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## Events Calendar

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
May	18	19 Full Moon	<b>20 WNAS Meeting @ 7:00 pm</b>	21	22	23	24 Star Party
	25	26	27 Last Quarter Moon	28	29	30	31 Star Party, Dark Sky Weekend
June	1	2	3 New Moon	4	5	6	7 Star Party
	8	9	10 First Quarter Moon	11	12	13	14 Star Party
	15	16	<b>17 WNAS Meeting @ 7:00 pm</b>	18 Full Moon	19	20	21 Star Party, Tentative BOG @ 6:30 pm