

Task Force preparing for August eclipse

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Later this year, the afternoon sky will become totally dark for more than two minutes while a total solar eclipse sweeps a narrow path across the United States. The nation has not seen a total solar eclipse in almost four decades so Clay County's Solar Eclipse Task Force is already at work trying to plan.

The eclipse will actually last a few hours on Monday, Aug. 21; however, total darkness in Clay County will only occur for 2 minutes and 33 seconds.

The event is so unusual, 20,000 to 30,000 thousand people may visit Clay County just to witness it first-hand, according to amateur astronomer Bob Hanson.

For years, Hanson has been studying eclipses and the impact they can have on an area. He said most people will come for the entire weekend, but many will also come earlier in the summer to stake out their viewing spot.

Eclipse weekend will mean a demand for overnight stays, restaurants and even public restrooms, but also a positive financial impact.

As thousands of cars travel throughout the area on Monday,

there could be road bottlenecks and many safety concerns.

The Eclipse Task Force is working to address all of those issues and more, including educating the public about eye safety. Looking directly at the eclipse while it is not in totality can damage one's cornea and special eye gear is needed.

The February meeting will include any non-profits in the area that may want to be involved. Later meetings will involve anyone from the public who may want to help in some way.

While many communities have hired full-time event planners for their eclipse events, Clay County has no funds for its Eclipse Task Force and no eclipse contact person.

Lee Holland, Chair of the voluntary Clay County's Travel and Tourism Board, has taken the lead role to help organize. She and Hanson are working with law enforcement, emergency services, some local businesses, DOT, Clay County Transportation and others to do as much planning as possible in the next few months.

For details call 389-0924 or e-mail: lee@claycountytraveland-tourism.com. Eclipse information is available at: www.eclipse-watch.com.