

Using art to inspire conservation



Dale Weiler of Weiler Woods for Wildlife makes a presentation with his stone sculpture at FernLeaf Community Charter School. PROVIDED BY WEILER WOODS FOR WILDLIFE

Weiler Woods for Wildlife teaches area students about endangered species

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Weiler Woods for Wildlife has been making presentations at area schools, demonstrating to students how art can be a means to save endangered species.

The founders, Dale Weiler and Loti Woods, recently made presentations at

both FernLeaf Community Charter School in Fletcher and also to eighth graders at Flat Rock Middle School. They made their presentation first to two fifth-grade classes at FernLeaf, according to Karen Dacey of Weiler Woods for Wildlife.

"Teaching two classes of enthusiastic fifth graders at FernLeaf was really rewarding," Dacey said. "About 40 stu-

dents in Alexis Hinchliffe's classes had been studying hellbenders, so the presentation included information about these shy creatures, their habitats and the challenges they face."

Dacey said students learned that hellbenders are the largest salamanders in North America and can grow more than two feet long.

"They live in rivers in 16 states in the Eastern United States and are considered threatened or endangered throughout that range. Hellbenders

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serve as a barometer for river health, because they require clean water to survive. It's important not to move rocks in streams and rivers to avoid disturbing their natural habitats," she said.

Pollution and siltation of rivers contribute to declines in the hellbenders' population, but there are numerous efforts by conservation groups to protect this native species, Dacey said.

"Students were happy to hear about nearby hell-

bender exhibits at the WNC Nature Center in Asheville and the North Carolina Zoo," she said.

Weiler uses art as a powerful source to inspire conservation, focusing his creative energies on carving wildlife and endangered species into stone, which he brings with him to the presentations to the students.

"Many of these pieces have been donated to museums, zoos, conservation organizations and nature and research centers that support the survival of critically endangered species," Dacey said.

"The students got to see and touch the stone sculpture, and that energized the next step," Dacey said. "After the presentation, the class worked on designs for a T-shirt to be used by local conservation groups who

raise awareness about hellbenders because they are considered vulnerable in North Carolina. Some of the student designs were amazing."

Just a few days later, Weiler Woods for Wildlife made a presentation to Sarah Wirt's eighth grade class at Flat Rock Middle School.

"We look forward to outreach with more area schools. Awareness in the community makes a big difference in inspiring others to care more about the environment," Dacey said.

For more information visit the website at www.weilerwoodsforwildlife.com or contact Loti Woods at loti@weilerwoods.com or by calling (561) 308-2651.