

Weed Warriors

Service Learning Program



The Weed Warriors Service Learning Program was developed by Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department's Division of Natural Resources in response to a growing problem we noticed in our county nature preserves. The program is designed to allow students an opportunity to learn first-hand about one of the most pressing problems for our natural communities today – exotic invasive plants. Exotic invasive plants, or Green Invaders, are alien plants that grow out of control, spread rapidly, and damage the environment. Students involved in the Weed Warriors program have the opportunity to learn about invaders specific to our area in their classrooms, schoolyards and nature preserves around the county. They will also help remove Green Invaders from particularly troubled areas in Mecklenburg County's nature preserves.

The Weed Warriors program consists of three main components:

- **Pre-service activities** at the students' school
- The **service learning experience**
- **Post-service activities** back at the students' school

Activity 1: Biodiversity Performs! adapted from World Wildlife Fund's

Biodiversity Basics curriculum

Students will learn about some of the "free" services that ecosystems provide by playing a charades-like game. During this activity, students will be able to work in teams to act out different ecosystem services, describe at least three "free" services that biodiversity provides to humans, and explain in their own words how these services make life on Earth possible.

Activity 2: Mecklenburg's Most Wanted

Students will learn what plants are Green Invaders in Mecklenburg County and what makes them so invasive. During this activity, students will learn to identify at least one Green Invader in Mecklenburg County using key plant characteristics and explain how at least one Green Invader is able to overwhelm natural communities.

Service Learning Component

Service learning experiences are working projects, actively involving all participants - they are not field trips. Students in the Weed Warriors program will spend a ½ day at one of Mecklenburg County's Nature Preserves, learning to identify and control one species of Green Invader. In most cases, this will be Microstegium, or Japanese Stilt Grass. Students will watch a video explaining the issue of Green Invaders, participate in a brief discussion of the issue, then divide into groups to participate in a weed pull in the nature preserve. Each group will participate in the Microstegium weigh-in at the end of the pull, and the total poundage for the individual groups as well as the class as a whole will be announced.



Activity 3: Green Pollution on Your Schoolyard?

Students will use their new plant identification skills to identify Green Invaders on their school grounds. During this activity, students will work in teams to identify and mark at least 3 Green Invaders that grow on their school grounds. Students will also develop and implement a survey to determine awareness of Green Invaders among their fellow students, teachers, and parent.

Activity 4: Fighting Back!

Based on the results of the survey in the previous activity, students will develop an action campaign to make other students, parents, and administrators aware of the Green Invaders issue on their school grounds. "Most Wanted" poster campaigns or a letter-writing campaign to the school administration or school board are two possible action plans for this activity.

The **Weed Warriors Service Learning Program** is a project of the
Mecklenburg County Division of Natural Resources.

For more information, please contact Reedy Creek Nature Center, Charlotte, NC.

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