

# D9

## South Central

### D9 Helps Create a Habitat Where Hellbenders Can Feel at Home

A group of Hellbenders set to be released this spring will come home to a new habitat thanks to a cooperative effort between MoDOT's Environmental Section, the Missouri Department of Conservation and District 9 Design, Construction, and Maintenance teams.

Hellbenders are among the largest salamanders in the world and can grow to over 2 feet long. They are only found in the eastern United States and are considered endangered under Missouri law. The Missouri Wildlife Code strictly forbids one from gigging, possessing or disturbing a Hellbender. Although the Hellbender has not yet been given federal protection, it was designated as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2001.

The presence of these protected animals was discovered during an environmental review that took place during the planning and design phase of a

bridge replacement project in Pulaski County in 2008. According to MoDOT Senior Biological Specialist Alan Leary, the relocation of the Hellbenders was necessary and more challenging than most. "MoDOT has relocated a variety of other species of plants and animals on other projects across the state, but this species and this project are unique. What we are trying here, with the removal and holding of the animals, habitat enhancement, and then returning the animals after project completion, has never been done with this species anywhere in the country. Fortunately, we already knew that the species could be held in captivity because MDC, the St. Louis Zoo, and others have lots of experience with that."

The salamanders could not remain in the stream during construction, as they

require a cool, clear stream or river with many large rocks to thrive. The clarity of the water is critical because the Hellbender breathes through its skin. It uses capillaries found in the folds of skin along its body and legs to extract oxygen from the water.



The very presence of Hellbenders in a stream is an indication that the water quality is good. A key factor in the de-

ments recently helped employees from MDC and MoDOT's Environmental Section to place approximately 240



St. Robert Regional Maintenance Supervisor Brian McMillian and Senior Maintenance Worker Don Boulware help unload rocks.

cline of the Hellbender population has been the runoff of soil and sediment into streams due to poor agricultural and development practices.

To ensure the protection of these animals during construction, staff removed as many hellbenders as they could capture and relocated them to a hatchery in Branson. Now that construction in the area has been completed, MoDOT staff have been working with MDC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance the habitat for the Hellbenders upon their upcoming release this spring.

To accomplish this, crews from the South Central District Design, Construction and Maintenance Depart-

large, flat, rocks in the river. These rocks will create an improved habitat for the Hellbenders, as well as other aquatic species in the area. "I think the day was a big success, we got a lot done and it turned out just like we hoped it would. We could see fish using the rocks within an hour of getting them in the water," said Leary.

As this is the first time this procedure has been attempted, the returned animals will be closely monitored upon their release. District 9 is happy to help with the protection of these salamanders, which are a vital part of the overall ecosystem and are important for keeping the stream's food chain balanced.

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### One-Day Team Spirit Youth Leadership Workshop Offered in D9

Twelve schools from the South Central district attended a one-day Team Spirit Youth Leadership Workshop on Oct. 12 in Salem, Mo. This workshop was a condensed version of the three-day Team Spirit Youth Leadership Conferences held in July each year in Cape Girardeau, Columbia and Kansas City.

Team Spirit is designed to empower our youth and encourage them to take an active role in promoting safe driving habits in their school and community.

Penny Lorenz and Chad Burton from ThinkFirst Missouri spoke to the students about "Using Your Mind to Protect Your Body."

After completing team building exercises facilitated by the Missouri National Guard the students listened to first hand experiences from St. John's Trauma Services Registered Nurse Pam Holt. Holt talked about traffic accidents and injuries. "We can fix your face, but we can't fix your brain, nerves, or your

spinal cord," stated Holt as she spoke about teen tragedies.

At the end of the workshop students from Alton, Crocker, Naylor, Newburg, Richland, Salem, Southern Reynolds County (Ellington), Steelville, Sullivan, Waynesville, West Plains and

Willow Springs developed their own action plan to address traffic safety in their community. As an added incentive, each school will be given a \$200 grant from the South Central Regional Coalition to help implement their action plans.



Students from Southern Reynolds County discuss traffic safety issues in their community with their sponsor before they develop their action plan.

#### for more info

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