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Film explores how Cherokees make nature their partner



Mask maker Davy Arch, a Cherokee elder and story teller, is featured in 'Nature's Wisdom Thru Native Eyes.'

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By Lightning Reports, Published: June 20, 2023

What happens when storytelling, native wisdom and nature's intelligence converge? A new film by award-winning documentary filmmaker David Weintraub and the Center for Cultural Preservation explores the answer in "Nature's Wisdom Thru Native Eyes," which premieres this week.

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"We were trying to stay connected to the natural world because we realized that everything that was connected to it thrived, so we understood that if we would stay connected to it, we would be prosperous as well," said Cherokee elder, storyteller and mask-maker Davy Arch, one of several native elders featured in the film discussing how for more than 10,000 years storytelling connected

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the tribe to nature and to one another, the use of medicinal plants and how the native approach that focuses on finding connections can help all of us heal our broken relationship with the living world.

Weintraub elaborates that what struck him most of all while working with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and half a dozen other native tribes is their sophisticated approach in seeing the connections between history, culture and nature.

"In the western tradition, humans are considered to be at the top of the hierarchy, with animals and plants far below," he said. "But native people instead believe that since humans were the last to come and have the least experience on how to live, they must turn to plants and animals as their teachers. By looking at the living world that way, it transforms us and how we view the living world. Instead of nature being our conquest, it becomes our partner."

"Nature's Wisdom" integrates native storytelling and philosophy with cutting edge science that's now discovering that what native people have been saying about the intelligence of nature for thousands of years is actually true!

"Recent research confirms that trees have a highly intelligent way of communicating with each other, sharing resources and warning each other of potential hazards," Weintraub said. "Many animals use tools, and communicate with each other in ways that we never thought possible before. And yet native stories and wisdom has observed these behaviors for thousands of generations."

Scientists participating in the film include Carl Safina, a *New York Times* bestselling author and nationally recognized wildlife ecologist as well as local botanists Steve Pettis and Dave Coyle, who discuss the importance of learning from native wisdom and how it is an important way to reconnect ourselves to the living world.

"Native people understood that all the knowledge needed to survive and thrive was contained in the land and that their role was not to change it or control it but to learn from it," Safina said.

What does film director Weintraub hope will be taken from his new film? "When we reestablish our relationship with the land as a sustaining force, as our grocery store, pharmacy and as our connection to both the past and the future, we truly become the stewards of creation that we were meant to be, connected to the wisdom of our ancestors who understood that history, culture, nature were all connected," he said.

Nature's Wisdom will have its world premieres in the Western North Carolina region from June 24 through July 1. Each screening will begin with native flautists and be followed by a discussion of the film with the filmmaker and film participants. World premieres are scheduled for Saturday, June 24, at North River Farms in Mills River as a drive-in theater with seating options (weather date June 30), at The Orange Peel in Asheville on Thursday, June 29, and at Trinity Presbyterian Church on Saturday, July 1. The starting time at all venues is 7:30 p.m.

Ticket prices vary by location and advanced reservations are highly recommended given high demand and expected sellouts by ordering online at www.saveculture.org or by calling the Center at (828) 692-8062. Ticketbuyers get \$5 off the price of the DVD if they buy it in advance.

This film is made possible by the Community Foundation of Henderson County, Prestige Subaru, the Arts Council of Henderson County and North Carolina Humanities. The Center for Cultural Preservation is a cultural nonprofit organization dedicated to working for mountain heritage continuity through oral history, documentary film, education and public programs. For more information all 828-692-8062 or visit saveculture.org

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