



SUSTAINABILITY IN PRISONS PROJECT

Our mission is to bring science and nature into prisons. We conduct ecological research and conserve biodiversity by forging collaborations with scientists, inmates, prison staff, students, and community partners. Equally important, we help reduce the environmental, economic, and human costs of prisons by inspiring and informing sustainable practices.

OUR VISION

This union of ideas and activities – with people inside and outside prison walls – creates a collaborative, intellectually stimulating environment in which incarcerated men and women play key roles in conservation and advancing scientific knowledge. We encourage teamwork, mutual respect, and a stewardship ethic among individuals who have little or no access to nature or opportunities in science and sustainability. Our vision is to raise awareness for the scientific enterprise, save tax dollars and natural resources, and help incarcerated individuals rebuild their lives through education, and direct links to nature.

OUR HISTORY

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is responsible for more than 16,000 inmates in 12 prisons in Washington – a commitment that draws heavily from the state's natural resources. In 2002, DOC responded to our Governor's directive to enhance the sustainability of its prisons. Concurrently, Evergreen began pilot activities at a minimum security prison to link scientists and conservation specialists with incarcerated men.

These efforts led to the establishment of the Sustainable Prisons Project (SPP) in July 2008. We now focus on prisons at Cedar Creek, Mission Creek Correction Center for Women, Stafford Creek, and the Washington Corrections Center for Women. These facilities represent a broad spectrum of population size, gender, security level, and infrastructure, which maximizes the extensibility of this project to other locations. We are beginning to document the effects of our activities on the knowledge, behavior, and attitudes of all participants and serve as a model for other prisons and residential institutions.

EDUCATION AND GREEN-COLLAR JOB TRAINING FOR INMATES

We inspire and train inmates and correctional staff through lectures and workshops designed to improve prison sustainability and connect participants to the larger world of science and conservation. Topics range from ecology and farming to business entrepreneurship and green energy prospects.



STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Through involvement in a wide variety of project tasks, we strive to create an excellent learning opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students. On any given day students may be analyzing data in the lab, contacting a prospective lecturer, or teaching inmates about the role of rare native plants in the prairie ecosystem.

CONSERVATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

With guidance from collaborating scientists, we carry out ecological research and conservation projects involving inmates, college graduate and undergraduate students, and community partners. Incarcerated individuals are raising endangered Oregon spotted frogs from egg to adult, propagating rare native prairie plants in greenhouses within prison walls, and raising endangered Taylor's butterflies for release on South Sound prairies.

SUSTAINABLE OPERATION OF PRISONS

We help correctional staff develop cost-effective, environmentally sound practices for operating prisons and engage inmates with direct responsibility for these activities where security is in place. Activities include recycling, composting, organic gardening, and bee-keeping.

SYNERGISM AND BENEFITS

Responses to this project have been universally positive. The Evergreen State College sees it as an opportunity for graduate and undergraduate students and faculty to be involved with meaningful education and cutting-edge conservation biology. Prison officials see it as a way to provide education, enhance social interactions, and reduce infractions by mentally engaging inmates. Conservationists view it as a way to grow biota needed to enhance drastically diminishing populations in a cost-effective way that is not exploitative, but rather provides connections for this nature-starved population to preserve the biosphere. We view it as a way to demonstrate that all components of society can participate in the scientific enterprise.

OUR PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF

Project participants include inmates, correctional officers, administrators and facility managers, as well as Evergreen faculty, staff and students, visiting scientists, and community partners such as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the Oregon Zoo, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and The Center for Natural Land Management.

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