

Saving the environment from behind bars

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By Lynne Peeples

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Paid just 85 cents per hour, inmates at a Seattle-area prison provide a relatively inexpensive source of scientific labor. But who knew they could also grow frogs better than some traditional research facilities?

The Seattle Times reports today about the [stunning success](#) a pair of inmates have had raising endangered Oregon spotted frogs at the [Ceder Creek Corrections Center](#). Only eight frogs have died out of the 80 eggs the two men started with in early April—a loss rate well below that of two zoos and a wildlife park that are also involved in the research project.

Over the last few months, Harry Greer and Albert Delp have taken careful notes while watching eggs transform into tadpoles and then frogs. They will continue with their responsibilities, which also include feedings and tank water changes, until the planned release of the frogs this fall.

“They have time to address care on a level that is not possible with those other institutions,” Marc P. Hayes, a senior researcher at the [Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#) and leader of the project, told *The Seattle Times*. “They baby those things literally night and day.”

Reviving an endangered frog that was once widespread in the Puget Sound region is just one of many environmental efforts underway at four facilities through the [Sustainable Prisons Project](#), a partnership between the Washington State Department of Corrections and The Evergreen State College. In Cedar Creek alone, inmates research mosses, compost food waste, and tend to gardens that grow approximately 15,000 pounds of food annually. Soon, they will be informing the controversy of [colony collapse disorder](#) by raising and studying bees.



In addition to the benefits for the economy and ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest, “the benefit for the prisoners is multifaceted,” explains Sarah Clarke, a graduate assistant involved in evaluating the project. “They gain a real sense of pride and accomplishment as well as skills for when they reenter society.”

One former inmate, Craig Ulrich, even ended up a first author on a [peer-reviewed paper](#) and is now pursuing a PhD in biochemistry at the University of Nevada, Reno. With skills honed on scientific investigation, ex-cons could go a lot further than they ever could with license-plate stamping.

Images of inmates and Oregon spotted frog by [Benjamin Drummond](#)