

Sustainability in Prisons Project Newsletter

Fall 2012, Issue 2



We bring
science, nature,
and sustainable
practices into
prisons



First Meeting of the SPP National Network

By Joslyn Rose Trivett, Conference Coordinator

The Washington state segment of the first SPP National Network conference was a resounding success. Professionals representing six states, three counties, and several national organizations brought their expertise in corrections, education, and sustainability to the Evergreen State College for the two-day conference. A National Science Foundation grant for nationalizing the SPP approach provided funding for the event. Forty SPP-WA staff and partners supported and contributed to the conference, hosting tours at three prisons and presenting SPP history and tips for success. Everyone benefitted from the diversity of experience and knowledge. All took away new connections with partners and allies, and a bolstered sense of how to implement or improve SPP-style programs. From conference attendee David Sepulveda:

I just wanted you to know that I really enjoyed the conference and that [we] brought back some really good ideas we can work on out here in California. I attended the California State Sheriff's Conference this week for jails and no one has sustainability on their radar. So I brought it up. Maybe LA and Santa Clara can be the leaders out here... we'll give it a try.



Central to the conference was exploring approaches for creating a national network as a means for sharing resources, strategies, and successes. The conversation continues post-conference, and will develop further when some of us meet again for the Utah segment in March, 2013.

Inside this Issue

- 2. Featured partner: Charlie Washburn
- 2. Vermiculture at Monroe Correctional Complex
- 3-4. Composting & the Prison Experience
- 4. Director's corner: Dan Pacholke
- 5. Oregon SPP
- 6. SPP Media Blitz!

SPP
Sustainability in Prisons Project

Featured Partner



Charlie Washburn

Corrections Program Manager
Cedar Creek Corrections Center (CCCC)

Charlie became involved with the SPP several years ago as the supervisor of the gardening and composting programs at Cedar Creek. He says, "When I came to CCCC, Dan Pacholke was the Superintendent and seeing how fired up he was about sustainability really got me going—both here at work and at home. I have learned a lot about sustainability since I have worked here and it has impacted me in many ways."

In writing about the impact the SPP has had on inmates, Charlie says: "I have seen many offenders leave this facility, after being involved with the SPP program, leave as different people." His commitment to helping inmates "turn their lives around" shone at the conference panel discussion when his comments drew enthusiastic applause: "For me that's what this program is all about, that is a big part of what this program is all about...I'm a people guy, and I want to see them make it. I want to see them make it. That's why I'm into this stuff."

SPP-WA is incredibly lucky to have such a committed partner. When asked about his goals for SPP in the future his answer was simple: "It is my goal to promote SPP in any way that I can."



Using Worms to Reduce Food Waste at Monroe Correctional Complex!

By Donna Simpson, Sustainability Coordinator

The Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC) is using worms to reduce food waste disposal costs while also providing meaningful science and sustainability education and work for offenders.

Currently at 5 million worms, the vermiculture program can process 10,000 pounds of food scraps per month, resulting in a cost reduction of more than 25%. This translates into big savings for the prison, which previously spent \$60,000 a year on food waste disposal before sustainability initiatives began.

In January of 2010, staff and offenders developed the vermiculture program by collecting just 200 red wiggler worms (*Eisenia fetida*) for three small breeding bins built by offenders. Very little funding has been invested in the program. As the worm population grew, new and improved models of worm bins were built by converting discarded barrels, old laundry carts, food carts, and recycled mattress materials. This indoor commercial-sized "Wormery" currently has more than 170 worm bins designed and built by

offenders. Seventeen of the bins are "flow-through" style. The flow-through bins are primarily built from re-purposed materials by offenders, whereas they would typically retail at more than \$5,000 each.

This program provides other benefits, including the worms' by-products—castings are a valuable, high-quality organic fertilizer sought after in the organic gardening market. The Wormery also produces 400 gallons of worm tea per week. The worm castings and worm tea fertilize the several acres of gardens at MCC.

Offenders in horticultural programs develop important vocational and life skills. The worm technicians at MCC wrote an operations manual that is now available to assist other institutions starting new vermiculture programs. They have also developed an extensive breeding program capable of exporting worms to other Washington institutions, agencies, or schools. Thus far, Washington State Penitentiary and Stafford Creek Corrections Center have received worms as a result of this program.

Composting & the Prison Experience

By inmate Steve Mahoney

I should preface this piece by saying that not all prison experience results in positive outcomes. Unfortunately the statistics regarding recidivism bear that out again and again. I can only relate my personal experiences and the healing process I have been through.

I started my prison experience in the suicide section of the county jail nearly ten years ago. I was placed in this unit with delirium tremens and severe suicidal ideations. I was charged with First Degree Assault which resulted in a one hundred eighty-four month prison sentence. I had absolutely no hope. I was at the bottom. I cared not for life and death would have been most welcome.

The yellow bucket is full. Waste from breakfast, lunch and dinner combined to make a soup of organic material that seems fit only for maggots, flies, and vermin of that particular ilk. The bucket is weighed and thrown into the dank stall with waste from former meals. The odor is unbearable to the uninitiated. Bark chips are added to create heat; the process begins.

After trial I was sent to a maximum security prison in Forks, Washington to begin my sentence. Stench of wasted lives and human failure personified assaulted me in my every waking moment. The walking dead were mixed with the hopeless to create an environment that was volatile on good days. It is only in

hindsight that I realize my healing began at the very place I thought my life might end.

The organic pile has been building for a month. The temperature has reached nearly one hundred sixty degrees. Close to two thousand pounds of rotting material have been combined to make a mound that is ready to be moved. The process continues.

I spent nearly two years with recurrent thoughts of suicide and other plans for my own demise. I hadn't seen my chil-

the process begins.

Wheelbarrows loaded one after the other as the decomposing waste is transferred from the stall to the next stage of the process. The temperature is still around one hundred and sixty degrees. Evidence that the material is breaking down can be seen throughout. Cabbage is now a wet, mushy substance that is putrefying moment by moment. The smell seems more powerful than when the pile was in the safe confines of the stall. Much work is yet to be done.



The visit with my children was bitter-sweet. Children deserve to have their father home with them. Children need their parents not only present but actively involved in their growth. How could I provide my kids anything from the place I found myself in? Long Distance Dads was the first program of-

dren the entire time I had been incarcerated. One day while contemplating my very bleak future I was given a reprieve. I was called into the counselor's office and informed that my three youngest children would be coming to see me. Hope! Dare I? My mother would bring them in about a week. I couldn't let these innocents see the mess I had become. My children certainly deserved better than what I was serving myself on a regular basis. I had to do something;

ferred that I partook of. I was out of the stall, I was still extremely hot and my life was odiferous to say the least, yet I was changing.

Twice a week for the next six to twelve weeks the decomposing pile of organic waste is turned inside out. The center of the pile becomes the outer and this is repeated over and over again until the temperature starts to drop. While the temperature of the pile remains in the

Cont'd next page...

Cont'd from page 3

120-150-degree range, change is becoming more visible. The pile no longer looks like food waste. The material is breaking down and begins to resemble bark mixed with dirt. The odor remains strong.

Over the next several years I began working a program of healing and transformation. I

attended an anonymous meeting where I was given tools with which to conduct my life in a more harmonious union with myself and others. I worked with mental health for over four years on anger and violence issues. I spent three years with a substance abuse counselor learning a way to live my life *sans* alcohol. Still a little warm on the inside but there was certainly a change my family recognized long before I did.

The pile of compost is dark brown, almost black, and has the smell of rich, luxuriant topsoil. The temperature is almost down to the ambient temperature. If the outside temperature is seventy degrees then the pile will be the same. The last stage of the process is to sift the larger bark chips out. Shovelful by



shovelful the compost is put on a metal grate and hand-sifted. The finished product will be used in the very garden that produced the vegetables that produced the waste in the yellow bucket so long ago.

I am not out of prison as of this writing; however,

my thought processes resemble little the mess that lay on the suicide floor ten years ago. I could say anything about who I have become yet I will let the actions I take each day speak for themselves. I have had much healing and restoration that I can only credit to a mind that has been transformed in much the same way as the composting process. I am actively involved in my own recovery. I freely share the precious gems of mental health and stability that have been given to me.

My hope is that when I am released I will be like the compost and be used by society to produce a harvest that will benefit others. ~Steve Mahoney has worked with several SPP programs during his incarceration. Photos Shauna Bittle.



Director's Corner

Dan Pacholke
SPP Co-Director
Director of Prisons,
Washington DOC

In 2004 when we started the Sustainability in Prisons Project, it wasn't even really a project. I set out to contain costs and develop partnerships within the community. I also had a problem to solve—I needed to expand capacity at a minimum security work camp that wouldn't let me do so without a \$1.4 million dollar expansion of the water treatment plant.

By reducing waste at that prison, I was able to expand capacity without the costly expansion of the water treatment

plant. We did it by catching rain water (there is lots of it here in Washington) and using it to flush toilets. That may have seemed like a small success, but it enabled the DOC to meet a capacity need without spending those hard-to-find dollars. Our efforts grew from there: we were using less, recycling everything we could, and sustaining our population with goods we grew ourselves. But when I became Prison Director in 2011, I wanted to take the programs even further, to turn prisons into helpful neighbors and a valued resource.

Through partnerships, we started raising endangered species with great success. I can't help but think that partly our success is because of offenders' special pride in their work. This work gives them a way to give back to the community and to participate in something that is bigger than themselves.

A Full Circle of Healing – SPP Oregon is Growing

By Tamara Mullen, Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE)



Tom Kaye & Stacy Moore at the conference. Photo Shauna Bittle.

The goal to grow IAE's Sustainability in Prisons Project-Oregon launched earlier this year and was infused with ever greater possibilities this September when IAE Executive Director Dr. Tom Kaye and Ecological Education Program Director Stacy Moore attended the SPP national conference. "The feeling at the conference was just electric; all of the participants were talking about the potential for programs they could bring back to their own state," said Moore.

The feeling inside the prisons turned out to be perhaps even more profound. Dr. Kaye described the experience: "It feels right and important. What we are doing with the SPP is making a real contribution to humanity from the perspective of healing, both personal healing and healing of the world. We are seeing first-hand the positive impact of 'restorative justice'—the idea of giving inmates the chance

to heal the wounds that lead to prison, and restore a sense of value, of contribution within prison and the greater community."

At one defining moment during a recent visit to an Oregon prison, Dr. Kaye stood with an inmate in the middle of a big farm field. "It was a calm summer day and we were in this open field set against fences and a tower with armed guards. But it was very quiet and calm there, amidst the reality of prison life. And one of the inmates said, 'Ahhh, this is so nice out here.' It was the way he said it—if you read between the lines, the meaning and impact was really broad. These projects are such a healing alternative to what is happening elsewhere in the prison system."

Although there is not a lot of hard data on what happens when the inmates leave prison after participating in these pro-

grams, there is a general consensus that SPP's impact on inmates is carried far beyond the prison walls. One former inmate is now starting his own horticulture business. Another gave a presentation at another conference about what SPP had done for his life: "I came in a convict and I came out a scientist."

The SPP project in Oregon needs your continued support. IAE's goal is to establish a workshop series program with our current partners—the Oregon Department of Corrections, Oregon Youth Authority and Multnomah Education Service District. We also plan to increase our current efforts in plant propagation of rare species such as Kincaid's lupine, as well as emulate Washington's award-winning wildlife rearing programs. We have already received generous donations from the Native Plant Society of Oregon Cheahmill and Portland Chapters for soil and pots. Please consider a donation to help us keep the Oregon Sustainability in Prisons Project going!



Growing the endangered Kincaid's Lupine at the Oregon Correctional Institution

The New York Times

Raising Frogs for Freedom, Prison Project Opens Doors



Matthew Ryan Williams for The New York Times
Taylor Davis, left, and Cam LeRoy counted frogs to be released near the Cedar Creek prison in
Littlerock, Wash.

By **KIRK JOHNSON**

Published: September 27, 2012

LITTLEROCK, Wash. — The birdman of Alcatraz became famous. But the frogmen of Cedar Creek are still anonymous beyond the tiny cult world of amphibian science. For now, they say.

Mat Henson, 25, serving a four-and-a-half-year sentence for robbery and assault, and his research partner, Taylor Davis, 29, who landed in the Cedar Creek Corrections Center here in central Washington for stealing cars, raised about 250 Oregon spotted frogs in the prison yard this summer.

Media Blitz on SPP!

By Joslyn Rose Trivett, Conference Coordinator

The Sustainability in Prisons Project received fabulous media coverage this summer. *Discover* magazine, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *Corrections One*, and blogs from *TED* and *Nature* all featured SPP. The Associated Press created a piece during the network conference that ran in over 75 papers nationally. We were especially excited about our story in *The New York Times* which highlighted our frog program at CCCC http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/us/raising-frogs-for-freedom-prison-project-opens-doors.html?_r=0. On November 18th, SPP was featured in CNN's *The Next List*. We've also received international attention, including a French film crew working on an exhibit for the Museum of Natural History in Paris.

Please visit our website's press room for the complete list and links. We are loving all the attention!



The Sustainability in Prisons Project
The Evergreen State College
Environmental Studies, Lab II
2700 Evergreen Parkway NW
Olympia, Washington 98505

bushk@evergreen.edu

www.sustainableprisons.org



Sustainability in Prison Projects Vision

The mission of the Sustainability in Prisons Project 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.

This union of ideas and activities—and 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 typically have little or no access to nature or opportunities in science and sustainability.