



## THE SUSTAINABILITY IN PRISONS PROJECT (SPP)

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 sustainable and compassionate 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 otherwise 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 opportunities to contribute.

### OUR HISTORY

The Sustainability in Prisons Project is a partnership founded by Washington Department of Corrections (WDOC) and The Evergreen State College. The partnership grew out of WDOC's response to the Governor's directive to enhance the sustainability of its prisons, and Evergreen's dedication to interdisciplinary education and community service.

Pilot activities from 2002-2007 showed surprising successes and unexpected benefits. In July 2008, the partnership was formalized as the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP). For several years following, SPP focused on programming in four western Washington prisons, and brought together a growing number of program partners—governmental agencies, zoos, non-profits, and community organizations.

In 2012 SPP expanded and has become a multi-state, international effort. To support this effort, SPP has distilled the elements that best define our programming and disseminated these in multiple ways; we have provided new SPPs with our Essential Components, tips for success, tours of successful programs, and a handbook of protocols. SPP programs can be found in all twelve Washington State prisons, and also in Oregon, California, Ohio, Maryland, and Utah. The SPP Network is taking off!

### AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

#### Conservation and Scientific Research

With guidance from collaborating scientists, we carry out ecological research and conservation programs involving inmates, college undergraduate and graduate students, and community partners. Incarcerated individuals raise endangered frogs and butterflies and propagate rare native prairie plants. With their contributions, we substantially increase the extent of restoration efforts.



### Sustainable operations

We collaborate with corrections staff to develop cost-effective, environmentally-sound practices for operating prisons. At the same time, we engage inmates with direct responsibility for managing resources. Activities include recycling, composting, organic gardening, aquaponics, and water conservation. Purchasing practices have moved toward eliminating unneeded products and packaging and buying greener products.

### Education

We connect inmates and corrections staff to the scientific and conservation community with guest lectures and workshops on sustainable practices, science, ecology, and environmentally conscious business. In addition, every SPP program involves an educational component, providing inmates and staff with detailed technical training and knowledge of related theories, planning, and intended outcomes.

### Community contributions

Every program offers opportunities to contribute; we provide avenues for positive influences on the world outside prison walls. Programs such as bicycle and wheelchair restoration and pet training provide direct donations to nearby community members. Inmates acquire new skills and have an empowering experience of giving back to the outside community.

### SYNERGISM AND BENEFITS

Responses to SPP have been extremely positive. Evergreen sees SPP as an opportunity for students and faculty to be involved with meaningful education, sustainability science, and cutting-edge conservation biology. Prison officials see it as a way to provide education, enhance social interactions, improve prison safety, and reduce operating costs. Conservation and community partners view it as a way to conduct restoration, research, and other community projects in cost-effective ways while at the same time giving inmates the chance to connect with nature and living things. SPP demonstrates that, given the opportunity, all sectors of society can benefit from education, participate in the scientific enterprise, and make positive contributions.

With every SPP program, we look to each participant for ideas on how to satisfy needs and objectives and find where these goals overlap. We only take on initiatives that include benefits to all partners: we believe that if everyone wins, then the programming itself will be sustainable.

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Photos: Benj Drummond (front & 2nd from top), Rod Gilbert (top), Cyril Ruoso (bottom & middle), Shauna Bittle (2nd from bottom)

### CONTACT US

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