

Conservation

Founded by The Evergreen State College
& Washington State Department of Corrections



Conservation Programs in Prisons

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP)'s conservation programs are highly complex and rewarding. Each program requires collaboration between an Evergreen graduate student, a faculty member, the SPP Program Manager, science advisers from partner agencies, and staff and inmate technicians from Washington State Department of Corrections (WDOC). Each team member plays a critical role and makes our unique science, conservation, and restoration work successful.

Pollinators: Honeybees & butterflies

SPP has engaged the patience and diligence of inmate technicians to achieve amazing success with pollinating insects. Washington State Penitentiary has reared and released hundreds of Pacific Northwest monarch butterflies. Several prisons cultivate honeybees to replenish pollinator populations.

Our flagship pollinator program rears the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas editha taylori*), a federally endangered species that once flourished from southern British Columbia to central Oregon. The SPP butterfly program at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women bolsters the original rearing program at the Oregon Zoo, adding to the scope and resilience of recovery efforts. From 2012-2015, inmate technicians, students, and corrections staff reared Taylor's checkerspot larvae with incredibly high rates of survival, and released more than 8,000 to Puget Lowlands' prairies. Inmates and students also researched the butterfly's egg-laying preferences, producing new understanding of habitat needs.

Herpetology: Oregon spotted frog & western pond turtle

The Oregon spotted frog (OSF; *Rana pretiosa*) is a state endangered and federally threatened species. This warm water marsh specialist has vanished from over 70% of its historic range. Since 2009, SPP has partnered with the OSF recovery group to raise these frogs in captivity and release them to the wild. SPP inmate technicians achieve high rates of survival and rear large, mature frogs. Inmates, staff, and students have successfully raised more than 625 OSF at Cedar Creek Corrections Center.

The western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*) is a state listed endangered species and one of only two native turtles in Washington State. Some adult turtles in the wild are struggling with a shell disease. While the cause of this disease is unknown, it is treatable; state biologists remove infected turtles from the wild for acute veterinary care. Turtles needing longer-term care are moved to Cedar Creek Corrections Center to receive daily cleaning, feeding, and monitoring. In the first 18 months of the program, technicians, staff, and biologists have cared for and released 24 turtles.

"This program has really enlightened my heart and mind, opening my eyes to a whole new world of opportunity." ~ Western pond turtle technician



Plants: Rare and endangered species

Our native plant programs are our largest-scale conservation initiatives, now comprising three established nurseries at Stafford Creek Corrections Center, Shotwell's Landing Nursery, and Washington Corrections Center for Women. A fourth nursery—this one for seed production—is in development at Washington Corrections Center; a fifth will be at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center. All but the last nursery are dedicated to growing rare and endangered prairie plants.

SPP works closely with conservation partners in the coordinated effort to restore the remaining prairies of the south Puget Lowlands. We grow native plants critical to prairie-dependent species such as streaked-horned lark and Taylor's checkerspot and zerene fritillary butterflies. Since 2009, we have produced more than 1.4 million native plants of more than 60 species. Each fall, we deliver to restoration site plantings or seed production beds.

Conservation partners and SPP staff provide training and education to inmate crews on prairie plant cultivation and restoration ecology. We also engage in scientific research relevant to the propagation of native plants. Inmates track germination, establishment, and responses to environmental conditions and various cultivation techniques; these data result in invaluable propagation protocols for difficult-to-grow species.

Conservation partners

Conservation programs are SPP's most complex programs, and require support from numerous partners. Our success is thanks to their faith in the ability of inmates to contribute:

- Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Center for Natural Lands Management
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Washington State University
- Centralia College
- Oregon Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and Northwest Trek
- Numerous prairie land managers
- National Park Service
- Pacific Rim Institute
- Institute for Applied Ecology
- U.S. Forest Service

Photos: SPP staff (front and 4th), Benj Drummond (top), Cyril Ruoso (2nd), Rosemarie Padavano (3rd and 5th)

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