

Overview

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



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 compassionate and sustainable practices.

Our Vision

This union of ideas and activities—with people inside and outside prison fences—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.

Our History

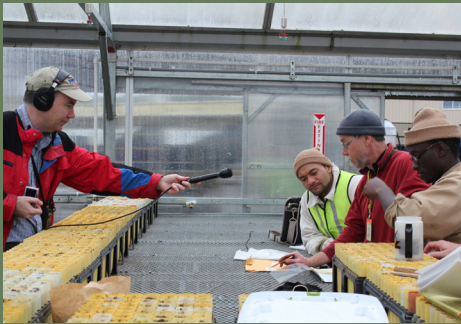
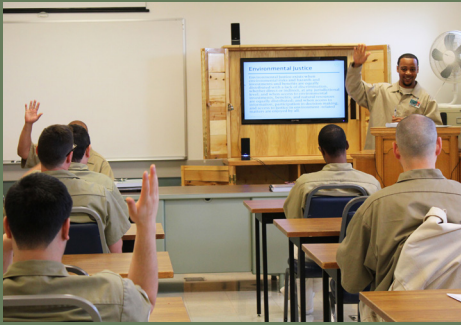
The Sustainability in Prisons Project was founded by Washington State Department of Corrections (WDOC) and The Evergreen State College (Evergreen). Evergreen's dedication to interdisciplinary education and community service and WDOC's desire to create more programs and increase sustainability proved a perfect match; pilot activities from 2003-2007 exceeded everyone's expectations! In July 2008, the partnership was formalized as the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP).

Early in 2015, Washington State's twelve prisons host 115 SPP programs. Joining the founding partners, more than 53 program partners make vital contributions to the effort: initiating new programs, providing resources, receiving donated goods, consulting, and helping to shape the incredibly diverse suite of sustainability programming. SPP has also grown beyond Washington: we launched eight more SPP teams across the country, and have heard additional interest from around the world. As we evolve, the founding partnership is stronger than ever. SPP-Washington serves as the SPP Network's hub and leading model.

Program Areas

Conservation and Scientific Research

With guidance from collaborating scientists, we carry out ecological research and conservation programs involving inmates, college students, corrections and SPP staff, and community partners. Incarcerated individuals raise endangered frogs and butterflies, care for sick turtles, and propagate rare native prairie plants. SPP increases the region's capacity for ecological restoration.



Sustainable operations

We collaborate with corrections staff and inmates to develop cost-effective, environmentally-sound practices for operating prisons. We entrust them with direct responsibility for managing resources. Activities include recycling, composting, organic gardening, aquaponics, and water conservation. Updated purchasing practices have eliminated unneeded products and packaging, and promoted greener products.

Education

We connect inmates and corrections staff to the scientific community with guest lectures and workshops on sustainable practices, science, ecology, and environmentally-conscious business. We offer Roots of Success, an environmental literacy course, in most prisons. Additionally, 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

Many of our programs provide avenues for positive influences on the world outside prison walls. Programs such as bicycle and wheelchair restoration and pet training contribute directly to nearby community members. Other programs create quilts and teddy bears for non-profit fundraisers. Inmates acquire new skills and are empowered to give back to the outside world.

Synergism and Benefits

With every SPP program, we look to each participant for ideas on how to satisfy needs and objectives and find where goals overlap. We only pursue initiatives that give benefits to all partners: we believe that if everyone wins, the programming itself will be sustainable. Responses to our approach are gratifying. Benefits of our collaboration include:

- Students and faculty practice education, sustainability science, cutting-edge conservation biology, and social justice
- Prison officials provide low cost programs, enhance social interactions, increase prison safety, and reduce operating costs
- Program partners conduct restoration and other projects cost-effectively, while promoting environmental stewardship
- Inmates receive meaningful education, employment, and opportunities to make a positive contribution

Photos: Benj Drummond & Sara Joy Steele (front, 4th, and bottom), Dennis Aubrey (top), Joslyn Rose Trivett (2nd), and Ricky Johnson (3rd).

Contact Us

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