

Sustainability in Prisons Project Summit Welcomes Statewide Corrections Staff to Evergreen April 22-23



Olympia, (Wash) Most people don't think of prisons as training grounds for a 21st Century workforce, but, since 2008 the Washington Department of Corrections (DOC), The Evergreen State College and myriad partners have been striving unceasingly toward that end.

On April 22-23, in honor of Earth Day, more than 100 Washington prison officials and partnering conservation, sustainability, and

community organizations will converge upon Evergreen's Olympia campus for the Washington State Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) Summit. The two-day workshop will cover policy, partnerships, education and planning for the training of inmates in science and sustainability professions.

Current SPP programs reach 3,000 of Washington's 17,000 inmates with conservation nursery, composting, threatened and endangered species captive rearing, and gardening programs. Renowned for its conservation work with the Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly and the Oregon Spotted Frog, SPP and partners have released more than 8,000 butterfly larvae from Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women. The butterfly program also bolsters the established butterfly rearing program at the Oregon Zoo. As for the frogs, more than 625 Oregon Spotted Frogs have been raised and released from Cedar Creek Corrections Center since 2009.

Evergreen faculty member Carri LeRoy, who has co-directed SPP with Deputy Secretary for the Washington State Department of Corrections, Dan Pacholke, an Evergreen alum, since 2011, says the summit offers a chance to reach out to new partners, including other colleges, and discuss the statewide sustainability policy recently launched by DOC. She is hopeful about the involvement of local colleges near the 12 Washington prisons. "College students in prisons can be great role models for inmates. In talking and working with students, many inmates begin to realize they are interested in furthering their educations," said LeRoy, who points out that education is the one of the biggest factors in mitigating recidivism.

LeRoy is also excited about a summit panel on community contributions. Depending on the prison facility, inmates grow vegetables, which they donate to food banks. They restore bicycles for children and wheelchairs for the disabled. The longstanding inmate service dog training and pet rehabilitation programs also fall under SPP. "We ask the question, how can we rehabilitate

people to come back into their communities? When inmates work with SPP, they are not just locked away; they are doing something for the community outside prison walls," said LeRoy.

The SPP also works with DOC staff on sustainable operations and education programs to encourage resource stewardship and reduce the carbon footprint of prisons. Projects have included building upgrades, alternative energy strategies, green purchasing and procurement, rainwater collection systems, recycling, composting, organic farming and beekeeping.