



Podcast: The Buzz on McNeil Island

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June 19, 2019

Total Run Time: 02:44

Podcast Transcript: Text Version

Female voice: So, what are some of the things we might be looking for in our hive on the right today?

Male voice: We're going to locate the queen.

Female voice: Yes, we are going to see if we can find the queen and she is marked.

Male voice: We're going to remove any broken or messed up frames.

Narrator: That's Laurie Pyne from the Olympia Beekeeper's Association talking to some of her students: inmates from the Cedar Creek Corrections Center. Today, she and the inmates have traveled to a spot near some apple trees on McNeil Island. Although the prison on the island closed in 2011, the island is home to some new residents: honeybees.

(Bees buzzing)

Narrator: It's all part of the Sustainability in Prisons Project, or SPP. SPP is a partnership between the Department of Corrections and the Evergreen State College. It lets inmates lead environmental science projects—like beekeeping-- in state's prisons. Altogether, SPP has 60 hives in prisons. The two newest are on McNeil Island. Inmate work crews—with state beekeeper's association staff- visit the hives every week to check on them.

It's a big task.

Music: 'Flight of the Bumblebee'

Narrator: The inmates are responsible for collecting data, identifying bees, feeding bees, making sure frames are in good condition, and that the overall hive is healthy.

Beekeepers say the seclusion of the island offers a rare chance to study the bees without threats associated with the mainland.

Olympia Beekeeper's Association member Laurie Pyne.

Laurie Pyne: This is almost unprecedented. I don't know of any other place that exists where there is a clean environment to put honeybees. There's no pesticide, there's no sprays that are used here, so there's nothing for them to get poisoned with. So that hazard has effectively been eliminated.

Narrator: Besides helping the bees thrive, officials say the program helps its human participants do the same.

Laurie Pyne: We have watched before our eyes the changes that these insects can make on these guys. They'll stand way back there and then they'll start watching the guys who are going through the hives and then they'll inch their way closer. Pretty soon, someone is saying, 'Can I do that too? Can I hold that frame? Can I see what you're seeing?' They're getting excited about what they're doing.

Narrator: Inmate James Resop agrees.

Narrator: What's the most interesting thing you've learned about the bees so far?

Inmate: The drones won't sting you!

(Laughter)

I didn't know. I've always been afraid of bees. Every time I'd see them, the only thing I'd want to do is swat them, but now I realize the importance bees have for the environment, so I'm a bit more open-minded, not just wanting to kill the bees.

Narrator: Rachel Friederich, D-O-C Communications.