

**ENS Mistin Ray
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2009
East Central University
Tanana Chiefs Conference
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My name is Mistin Ray; I am currently working on a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. I first learned about USPHS in an Intro to Environmental Health class, and I immediately became interested. A former classmate named Brandon Parker gave a presentation about his experience in Bethel, Alaska in the summer of 2008, and I knew Alaska was where I wanted to be. Being a Native American myself, I was



enthralled with the challenges that were to be faced and wanted to be a part of such a wonderful endeavor for improving the lives of Alaskan Natives. I was directed to Dr. Patrick Bohan, a retired USPHS Captain, who introduced me to Jr. COSTEP opportunities, answered all of my questions, and guided me in the long journey of paperwork that was required.

I began speaking with LCDR Troy Ritter and LTJG Jennifer Dobson in Anchorage, Alaska with whom I expressed my extreme interest in an internship in Indian Health Service. Following my phone interview, I soon heard from LCDR Greg Calvert in Fairbanks. I was then selected for a duty station in Fairbanks with Tanana Chiefs Conference Office of Environmental Health (TCC-OEH).

Tanana Chiefs Conference is a nonprofit organization that serves 42 Native Alaskan villages in the interior. OEH assists villages with water supply protection; safe handling and disposal of sewage and solid waste; vector control (including the rabies virus); injury prevention in villages; and hazardous materials management. In addition, they conduct surveys of village health and sanitation facilities, and conduct occupational health and safety investigations.

The TCC region covers an area of 235,000 square miles which is equal to roughly 37 percent of the State and is only slightly smaller than Texas. Most of the villages can only be reached by plane while some are accessible by road. The vast area presented me with the awesome opportunity to take numerous bush plane flights to the villages. I traveled a lot to assist tribal and city council members along with water plant operators in the completion of the annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). CCRs are a recap of the previous year's water quality data which is to be posted to the public. I really enjoyed the travel. It was not only a great way to see Alaska but also a very fulfilling opportunity to see how much time that is spent just to plan travel into the villages. I also was able to build friendships with the village members and my own coworkers that I met and worked with.



My experience in Fairbanks, Alaska was more than what I expected. I have gained great hands-on experience that will help prepare me for my future career. I have also gained a better understanding of Alaska Native culture and workings of the tribes. I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity of my COSTEP in Alaska. I recommend the JrCOSTEP program to all students pursuing a career in Environmental Health or the Public Health Service. I definitely

learned a lot about PHS during my internship. I advise potential COSTEP students to dive into any learning opportunity when it comes to PHS if serious about the Commissioned Corps. Most importantly, do not get discouraged with the mound of paperwork because I can tell you that it is very well worth the effort.

