

**ENS Adam McCrary
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2010
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My name is Adam McCrary, and I am currently attending Illinois State University (ISU) in the Environmental Health (EH) program. In order to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health, a professional practice internship is required. I was interested in finding a competitive internship that offered field environmental health experience in a unique atmosphere. I heard about the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) with the Indian Health Service from retired USPHS CAPT George Byrns, who is currently a professor at ISU. The summer JRCOSTEP was the best option for me since I had prior uniformed service experience. I had recently returned home from a deployment to Afghanistan with the U.S. Army, in which I had reached the end of my enlistment. Mr. Steve Hand, a HR specialist at the Division of Commissioned Corps Recruitment, helped me through the lengthy application process, and I was able to complete all of the required documents without too much irritation.



I was contacted by LT Jennifer Dobson, an EH consultant at Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and offered a JRCOSTEP at Tanana Chiefs Conference Office of Environmental Health (TCC-OEH) in Fairbanks, AK. After I accepted the position, I was contacted by CDR William Justice, TCC-OEH Director, and was able to ask questions about my future internship, such as living arrangements, typical daily activities, and possible EH projects. Two months before I was scheduled to depart to my duty station, I was notified that all call to active duty orders had been halted. I was distraught and feared that I was going to lose the COSTEP opportunity that I had worked so hard to obtain. Thankfully, CAPT Jeff Smith, Director of EH Support at ANTHC, offered all COSTEP applicants their positions as non-commissioned interns. I accepted the position and was able to go to my duty station without delay. While at my duty station, I was successfully converted to the COSTEP!



TCC is a nonprofit organization that serves 42 Alaska Native villages within Interior Alaska. TCC-OEH is a part of the Department of Health Services. OEH assists tribes with water supply protection, safe handling and disposal of sewage and solid waste, food sanitation, vector control (including the rabies virus), injury prevention, and hazardous materials management. OEH also conducts surveys of village health and sanitation facilities. The TCC region encompasses roughly 37%

of the State of Alaska, which is about 235,000 square miles. A large majority of the villages in this region are remote and can only be reached by small plane or boat.

During my time in Alaska, I was able to visit numerous villages and conduct various field EH work. Some trips would take only one day while some involved an extended overnight stay. In the field, I was able to assist my coworkers with sanitary surveys and EH assessments. I administered lay rabies vaccinations to dogs in

Koyukuk so as to prevent possible incidents of rabies transmission to humans. I was also able to complete research for my project on outhouse conditions in rural Alaska and their potential public health implications. In Fairbanks, I helped village water plant operators complete annual Consumer Confidence Reports (CCR). A CCR summarizes information on water quality, including water sources used, detected contaminants, and compliance information, and must be available to consumers on an annual basis. I was also able to conduct research on the availability and practicality of hand washing sinks for health clinics in remote villages without access to running water.

My experience in Alaska was definitely one of a kind. The invaluable on-the-job training I received was beyond comparison in relation to other EH summer intern opportunities. My co-workers were friendly and made my visit to Alaska one worth remembering. They were always willing to help and share their vast wealth of knowledge and experiences. The tribal and city council members that I worked with gave me a greater appreciation for Alaska Native culture. I would recommend the JRCOSTEP to anyone who is seriously considering a career in either Environmental Health or the U.S. Public Health Service. This opportunity is a great way to gain experience in your chosen field while maintaining the integrity and distinctive qualities of a commissioned officer in the PHS Commissioned Corps!

