

**ENS Lailani Rockholt  
Jr COSTEP Summer 2011  
Western Carolina University  
Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation  
Dillingham, Alaska**



Let the adventures begin! My name is Lailani Rockholt, and I was born and raised in the southern state of North Carolina. I am currently a senior studying Environmental Health at Western Carolina University. I found the internship opportunities offered through the Commissioned Corps unexpectedly while doing some personal research. My professors advised me to apply for multiple internships, but the only one I had my heart set on was the Jr COSTEP, specifically in Alaska. North Carolina will always be home, but there is certainly more to explore beyond its state borders. So I put all my eggs in one basket and started the paperwork, determined to be selected for the Summer 2011 Alaska Jr COSTEP.

My duty assignment with the Indian Health Service was at the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation in Dillingham. Dillingham is located in southwest Alaska and is only accessible by boat or plane. BBAHC is the native health corporation for the 34 villages in the Bristol Bay Region. BBAHC provides a multitude of health services to the people of Dillingham and the 34 villages, including Environmental Health services.



My summer in bush Alaska (what we refer to as rural Alaska) exposed me to the diverse and unique needs and situations of the villages in the Bristol Bay Region. One of the best opportunities I had to experience this individuality was out in the field for village trips. I traveled to Aleknagik (north shore), Clark's Point, Ekwok, and Igiugig to assist with conducting solid waste, wastewater, and village clinic inspections. Likewise, during these village trips I helped provide rabies vaccinations to the rural communities. These village trips really emphasized how vital it is to have

exceptional communication skills and to keep an open mind for all situations, cultures, and locations within the Indian Health Service.

The office environment also brought me a wealth of knowledge that I will use to enhance my skills as an environmental health professional. In our water laboratory, I was able to test and monitor for total coliform and E.coli for the monthly water samples received from 20 of our villages. I also served as a head investigator for rabies investigations when a dog bite report was submitted for review. Furthermore, I was responsible for completing and submitting the annual Consumer Confidence Reports to inform the villages of their overall water quality, recent testing performed, and any issues within their system. And I was committed to producing some of the survey reports from recent village trips.

Along with my regular duties, I was occupied with two research projects. The first was an investigation of electrical safety concerns that are manifested in boat hauling. Dillingham continues to be a fishing community. The precautions around electrical safety are not always abided by and are warranted for individuals involved during the boat moving process. The second project involved follow up research for a risk assessment of radon in the Bristol Bay Region.



The options for recreational activities in Dillingham are far from boring! Some took only a few hours, some a whole day, and some an entire weekend! One of my shorter more memorable activities was kayaking on Twin Lakes. I was also invited to go boating up to Second Lake for an entire day of sight-seeing and fishing! But the most impressive and unforgettable was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend spent camping on the Nushagak River with friends.



Finally, one item that cannot go unmentioned is the fish. The fish in the Bristol Bay Area are an essential way of life in the community's culture. Near the end of my internship I was taught by one of the best chefs in town how to fillet, strip, hang and dry, cut, can, and cook the fish produced from subsistence fishing.

As time began to slip through my fingers within the final weeks I realized my adventure to Alaska was more than just an internship requirement. This experience brought me so many moments of being on top of the world. It provided me with the reassurance that this is what I was destined to do. Remember, it's about the people, and will always be about the people. For those of you considering a CoSTEP, I say go for it, head on!