

**ENS Melanie Carpenter  
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013  
East Tennessee State University  
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Portland, OR**

My name is Melanie Carpenter and I attend East Tennessee State University, where I am working toward a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Health. A component of this program is to complete an internship in the environmental health field. I was fortunate enough to be accepted into the JrCOSTEP and an assignment with the Indian Health Service in Portland, Oregon during the summer of 2013.



I first heard about the Indian Health Service (IHS) through a professor I had for an Environmental Health course. He highly recommended that I consider it as a potential internship because of the hands-on experience and the service they provide to communities. The same semester I had a friend who returned from completing her Jr COSTEP at IHS in Portland, Oregon. She described her summer to me and depicted the perfect internship! I immediately knew it was an opportunity I wanted to experience. I applied for the internship and got in touch with CDR Celeste Davis in Portland, Oregon. She was absolutely wonderful! She kept in touch with me through the whole process and helped smooth out all the bumps and hurdles along the way. I couldn't have asked for anyone better.



Then the nervousness set in about starting my internship... It was the first time I was going to use the skills I had learned over the past couple of years in my program. I soon realized I had nothing to worry about because I was working with great people who were willing to be patient and help guide me through the unfamiliar. They answered my endless amount of questions and I was able to absorb a great deal of new and valuable information.

I was very excited to call Oregon my summer home! The northwest has some of the most beautiful views and the perfect summer climate! Seeing Mt. Hood on my way to work every day was very motivating. Traveling to the Tribal reservations also provided amazing landscapes and scenery. I felt like I was driving through a postcard. There is so much history within these mountains and hills.

During my internship I joined LT Matthew Ellis and LCDR Shawn Blackshear on surveys of the "in lieu of" sites along the Columbia River Gorge. There are about 31 different fishing sites along the river. The in-lieu fishing sites are for the benefit of the Yakama, Umatilla, and Warm Springs Indian Tribes, and other Columbia River Indians who had treaty fishing rights at locations inundated or destroyed by Bonneville Dam. At these sites we assessed the health, sanitation, and safety conditions of the fish cleaning stations, restrooms, smoke houses, and the water wells. This was a great way for me to become familiar with the history of the "in lieu of" sites and to interact with the local fishing communities. I was able to use my acquired knowledge to evaluate these sites.

The Portland Area provides services to 43 different Tribes in Oregon, Washington, and a portion of Idaho. I had the opportunity to visit several of these Tribal reservations to assist with institutional surveys of healthcare facilities and surveys at food establishments. I also toured Headstart, hotel lodging, jail, pool, and casino facilities to learn more about their environmental health concerns and how to provide recommendations for them. I thoroughly enjoyed going out into the field to gain hands on experience. This has given me skills and

understanding to perform and accomplish tasks that will be assigned to me in the environmental health workforce.

In between visits to the reservations, I spent time in the area office. This was a new experience for me because I had never had an office setting job. I realized that work in the office and “behind the scenes” can be equally as important as going out into the field. There is a great deal of planning and organizing that goes into providing the best health services for the Tribes. It is very encouraging to see people who are passionate about what they do. I am glad I got to be a part of the Portland team.

The Jr COSTEP program is an amazing opportunity that offers hands-on experience with a chance to explore new places. You are able to dive into the environmental health field with people who are very knowledgeable and dedicated to making a difference. I will take this experience and what I learned with me through my future endeavors. I **HIGHLY** recommend the Indian Health Service Jr COSTEP to students who are searching for an internship where you are challenged to learn and grow. This program has been extremely influential and has strengthened my skills in and out of the environmental health field.

