

Masie Cully
Summer Extern 2016
East Central University
Portland Area Office
Portland, Oregon

My name is Masie Cully and I am currently a senior at East Central University in Ada, OK pursuing a B.S. in Environmental Health Science. Born and raised in Oklahoma with Seminole and Creek

heritage, I was eager to branch out to a different part of the country and experience how Indian Health Service worked towards healthy indigenous communities outside of Oklahoma.



Look out at Cape Horn, Washington

When I began my search for an internship it was suggested by my professor, CAPT Patrick Bohan, USPHS (Ret), that I look into spending my summer working under CDR Celeste Davis, as she was widely known for being a strong female leader in Environmental Health within Indian Health Service and the USPHS. After applying to the IHS Externship and selecting the Portland Area Office as my first preference, it wasn't long before I heard that Portland, Oregon was where I would be spending my summer.

As soon as I arrived in Portland I was greeted with open arms and eager hearts. It was then that I sat down with CDR Davis and quickly learned that she wanted me to experience as much versatility within environmental health as possible while I was in the Pacific Northwest.

I spent the beginning of my summer learning about the inner workings of an Area Office of Indian Health Service. Due to outlying reasons, CDR Davis was deployed shortly after I arrived but in the time spent with her I was able to listen in on her day to day tasks of being a Director of the Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS) and an Emergency Management Coordinator. After her departure, LCDR Matthew Ellis was quick to step in and help guide me around the Portland Area for the rest of summer. One of the first projects I assisted with in Portland was composing Community Environmental Health Assessments for Shoshone-Bannock and Nez Perce Tribes. Led by Jacob Phipps, Environmental Health Specialist, these assessments would eventually go back to the tribes and help them prioritize community health disparities in their communities. I helped condense and summarize asthma and vector-borne disease data obtained from the IHS Notifiable Disease and External Cause of Injury Reporting System, as well as data obtained from the tribes' data analysts at the clinics. Also while spending time in Portland, I was able to participate in the Native American Research Center for Health Summer Institute hosted by the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board. I was able to take three, week-long courses including Indigenous Research Methods, Biostatistics, and Cancer Prevention and Control



Indigenous Research Methods Class of 2016 led by Dr. Cornel Pewewardy and Dr. June Strickland

with other professionals working in diverse areas of American Indian/Alaskan Native health from across America.

The second half of my summer was spent exploring the field offices overseen by the Portland Area Office and addressing public health concerns in food safety, water quality, injury prevention, disease prevention, and healthy housing. Trips to the field offices let me travel and experience different native cultures across Oregon and Washington, including Lummi, Swinomish, Samish, Yakama, Chehalis, and Nooksack Nations. My duties in those communities ranged from co-conducting facility/housing surveys with LCDR Shawn Blackshear and legionella/sepsis outbreak investigations with LT William Burrows, to working with tribal members one-on-one doing health promotion with LCDR Stephanie Coffey for the health boards and IHS.

Thanks to the DEHS team in the Portland Area Office, my summer experience went way beyond my expectations. Not only did they advocate for me to get a taste of an incredibly enchanting area of the country while working, they also made sure I more than fulfilled the cultural experience I requested in the beginning of the summer. Learning from passionate leaders across the Pacific Northwest and seeing a rainbow of techniques being implemented to raise the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health in Native Americans/Alaskans Natives was a very beautiful thing. I'm so excited to take all of the wisdom I gathered this summer and bring it home to share with my own communities in Oklahoma. I will forever be indebted to those that ensured I had the best experience that they could offer an IHS Environmental Health Extern and would recommend anyone thinking about applying to take the leap and be ready for one of the most adventurous learning experiences of your life!



Promoting the Northwest Washington Indian Health Board at the 2016 Tribal Canoe Journey