

**ENS Robyn Hoover**  
**JRCOSTEP Summer 2018**  
**Western Carolina University**  
**Reno District Office**  
**Reno, Nevada**



I am a rising senior at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. I will graduate in May of 2019. My interest in doing a JRCOSEP came from hearing about experiences from other students. I was assigned to the Indian Health Service (IHS), Division of Environmental Health Services, Reno District Office for my JRCOSTEP. The District Office serves more than thirty tribes in Nevada, Utah, and California. My preceptor was LTJG Francis Park but I was also able to go in the field with a number of other officers.

I had the opportunity to assist with a wide range of community-based environmental health and injury prevention services such as: animal rabies vaccination clinics; mosquito surveillance; seat belt usage surveys; surveys (inspections) of food establishments, health clinics, youth and senior centers, swimming pools, and daycares. I also participated in consult visits troubleshooting at two arsenic treatment plants, and collecting water samples to test for chlorine residual and submit to a lab for lead testing.

One of the first activities I participated in was assisting with rabies vaccination clinics in Owens Valley, CA. The clinics were held for Benton, Big Pine, Bishop, Bridgeport, Ft. Independence, and Lone Pine Tribes. This two day event was a partnership with the IHS and U.S. Department of Agriculture's, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and covered about 350 miles. It was an exciting experience being able to work with Environmental Health Officers, Veterinarians, and the community to meet a common goal and vaccinate dogs and cats. These clinics are an important public health measure to continue to reduce human and animal rabies cases.



Another aspect of this internship included assisting with food service surveys. I was able to participate in about 20 surveys of tribal establishments throughout the District, working with my Preceptor and other EHOs. Experiencing how to identify concerns relating to food safety and working with those in establishments to improve findings was a valuable experience. It was a great opportunity to apply and expand what I had learned in my studies at school. Assisting with this work also provided me with the opportunity to learn how to write reports, which was valuable to developing my professional skills.

Another highlight of my JRCOSTEP experience was traveling to Ft. Duchesne, UT to work with CDR Mohler at the Ute Tribe's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Powwow. I was able to assist with a Temporary Food

Vendor Safety Training before the event by helping the participants practice calibrating thermometers and testing chemical sanitizing solutions for the correct concentration. Then we conducted pre-operational and operational food inspections of the eleven temporary food vendors present. I had the chance to observe the opening ceremony and some of the dances. I had never been to a powwow before and attending this event was an unforgettable professional and cultural experience.

Another highlight of my JRCOSTEP experience was working with the IHS District Environmental Health and Sanitation Facility Construction (SFC) Engineers on a special project to create a Utility Safety Manual for the Reno District. The manual would serve as a template for tribal water, wastewater, and solid waste programs in developing and implementing safety programs. Many tribal utilities lack written safety manuals and safety training and monitoring to ensure worker safety, despite the significant hazards that workers are exposed to. The utility safety manual template would provide a broad baseline plan, based on standards, regulations, and best practices that can be customized to operations and allow operators to more effectively recognize and control worker safety risks. This had been identified as a need for several years and would not only be a tool for promoting safety management, but can also impact scoring for SFC projects to help improve system infrastructure in tribal communities. The project involved updating an existing sample utility safety manual and developing supplemental forms and checklists, with feedback from District OEHE staff. It also included participating in field work with OEHE staff to better understand the application of the safety information. During the course of the summer, I had the chance to work in the field with several Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Engineers. This created an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the IHS Environmental Health and Engineering programs, as well as observe the variety of approaches to addressing environmental health and safety concerns.



My summer had many highlights and I learned more than I could have imagined. A lot of the summer I was out in the field rather than in the office, which I really enjoyed. Being able to apply and expand on the topics first hand that I had been studying at school allowed me to learn a lot and grow professionally as well as individually. I enjoyed the consultative role of IHS as opposed to a regulatory role, and appreciated the valuable opportunity to learn about diverse Native American cultures by being able to work with a number of tribes. The many opportunities to travel and see different parts of the United States was exciting, and coupled with the many work experiences gained, I had an unforgettable summer where I was challenged every day.

My summer experience encouraged the excitement I have for a future career in environmental health and I highly recommend this opportunity to other students. It was an unforgettable experience and I am thankful for the opportunity and to all of the many people who were a part of it.