

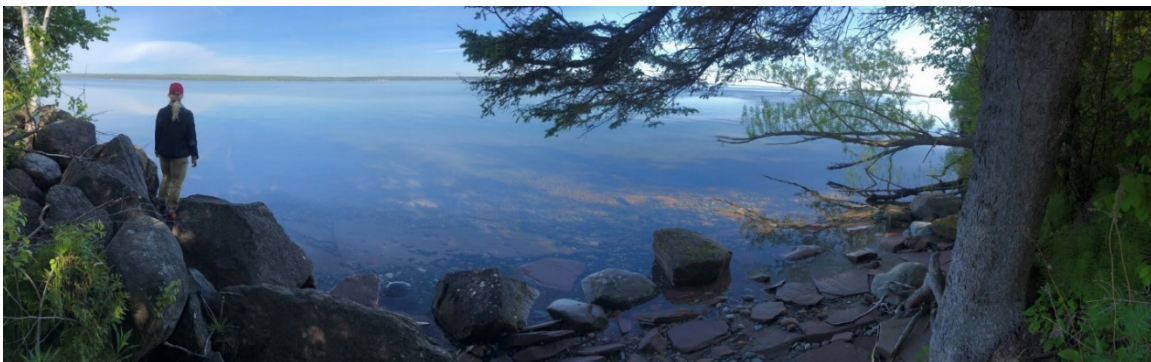
ENS Kiliegh Meredith
JRCOSTEP Summer 2019
Missouri Southern State University
Rhineland District Office
Rhineland, Wisconsin



My name is Kiliegh Meredith and I am currently a student at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Missouri, and will graduate in December 2019. I will be graduating with two Bachelor of Science degrees: Environmental Health and Safety; and General Biology. For my EHS degree, a requirement was to have at least 180 observation hours. I learned about the JRCOSTEP when my supervisor explained that someone from the U.S. Public Health Service in Oklahoma City would be visiting our class only one day to discuss the opportunity that was at hand. After the presentation, I knew this externship would be a great starting point for my career.

After submitting all my paperwork and patiently waiting, I received a phone call from LTJG Garrett Steiner, who was also a former JRCOSTEP, and accepted an assignment in Wisconsin. I had never visited Wisconsin before, but was up for the task. I was going to be working for the Indian Health Service (IHS) in Rhineland, WI, which is part of the Bemidji Area IHS. This Area covers tribes throughout Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and upper parts of Indiana. My preceptor was Barry Hugo, who had been conducting environmental work for over twenty years. I knew the knowledge he had gained over his career was going to further my understanding of how to communicate with others, as well as information that I could not necessarily receive from a classroom setting.

During my externship with the Indian Health Service, I completed Food Handler's trainings and online trainings for the government the first couple weeks. After finishing the initial trainings, out into the field we went! Many of the days consisted of visiting the different tribes and conducting routine food inspections at casinos, restaurants, bars, gas stations, and vendor's temporary food setups at powwows. We also conducted routine surveys and walkthroughs of wastewater and water treatment facilities, and of solid waste facilities. Because of the many food inspections that were done, I became very familiar with the IHS's Web-based Environmental Health Reporting System, as well as the FDA's Food Code.



Additionally, a new area of environmental health was added to the agenda; vector surveillance of ticks and mosquitoes. This was a relatively new sector for the Bemidji Area. We set up several types of mosquito traps in order to catch the different species of mosquitoes that were native to Wisconsin. Our team set up many because of an emergent disease that had not been heard of since the 1970s, called Jamestown Canyon virus, which had several outbreaks in the northern Wisconsin. This virus causes neurological damage, so we wanted to mitigate the chances of someone being infected as much as possible by conducting surveys where the mosquitoes could potentially be located. For ticks, we performed ‘tick drags’ with a large cloth that we carried behind us. Lyme disease is a prevalent and dangerous disease contracted from deer ticks, so we wanted to conduct surveys for these vectors as well to inform the public of how to reduce the risks of contraction.

The work experience that this externship brought me was everything that I needed to advance my communication abilities, time management, and displaying the knowledge I had gained over the years at university. My communication skills were definitely tested, as well as how to handle situations that were not always comfortable. Nonetheless, I prevailed and I have learned how to handle stress and difficult situations more effectively than I could have ever imagined. Furthermore, working with people from a different culture was eye opening and appreciated unconditionally. I learned that this job is not about asserting knowledge or precedence, but about respecting one another and openly communicating and understanding each other. I gained a new perspective of the Indian Health Service and the service that each person truly wants to provide to Native Americans.

One of my favorite parts of the internship was to be able to apply my knowledge of course, but also to see some of the most beautiful sites: untouched wilderness, the Great Lakes, mountain views, and more. I am a nature enthusiast, so this put the cherry on the cake!

My time at the Indian Health Service in Rhinelander was unforgettable. The mentors and coworkers I worked with were helpful and only wanted me to succeed. I am truly thankful I was able to experience this opportunity and would recommend it to anyone who is interested in public health and safety. Although this internship did prove challenging at times, I overcame my own fears and bettered myself for the future. I thank the Indian Health Service, as well as my preceptors, for allowing me the opportunity to succeed and become an all-around better person.

