

ENS Cori Crocker
JRCOSTEP Summer 2021
East Tennessee State University
Keams Canyon Service Unit
Polacca, Arizona



My name is Cori Crocker, and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) in Johnson City, Tennessee. I have completed my first year of graduate study and will earn a Master of Public Health (MPH) in Environmental Health in May 2022. I obtained a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science from the University of South Carolina in 2018, and following my graduation, I joined the United States Peace Corps as a secondary education volunteer in Guinea. A background in science and the French language as well as a desire to serve inspired me to seek this opportunity. During my time in the Peace Corps, my passion for science,

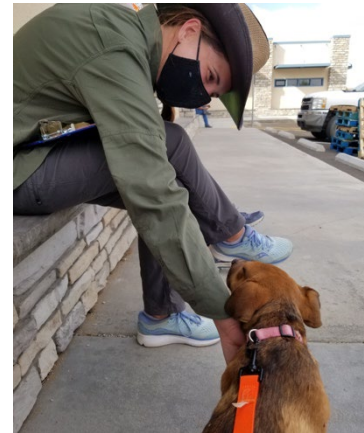
education, and public health initiatives grew. This experience led me to the field of public health, specifically environmental health. A requirement of the MPH program at ETSU is the completion of the graduate public health field experience. The field experience provides an opportunity for students to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained through their coursework. I chose to complete my field experience with the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training Externship Program (JRCOSTEP) of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and the Indian Health Service (IHS).

At first, I found the adjustment to living and working in Arizona difficult. As I worked with the Keams Canyon Service Unit, which serves the Hopi and Kaibab-Paiute Tribes, I grew to like the work, environment, and people. I lived on the Hopi Reservation, and the Office of Environmental Health was located in the Hopi Health Care Center. My preceptor was LT George Chung, and under his supervision I learned the duties and responsibilities of an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) with IHS. Despite the office being located in the Health Care Center, I was able to work throughout the reservation, which is 2,500 square miles and consists of 13 villages that are found on top of and surrounding three mesas. The terrain is beautifully expansive and was incredibly novel to me, coming from Tennessee. During this time, I was able to apply the knowledge and skills I gained from my studies, and I learned about the customs and cultures of the tribes I was serving. The majority of my work took place with the Hopi Tribe, but I also had the opportunity to visit and work in the San Carlos and Whiteriver Service Units, Eastern Arizona District, Phoenix Area IHS.

The duties of an EHO are a wide array of activities that serve to protect the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives from environmentally related disease and injury. As a JRCOSTEP, I participated in the following activities: food safety inspections; animal bite investigations; mosquito-borne disease surveillance; sewer system inspections; drinking water system inspections; and health and safety inspections of establishments such as hotels, motels, recreational areas, and campgrounds. Many of the activities I completed this summer were

focused on food safety, as reducing the risk of foodborne illness is vital to public health. I participated in and led many food safety inspections of restaurants and kitchens in establishments such as schools and senior centers, and I became a Certified Food Manager. I also conducted the first foodborne illness risk factor study for the Eastern Arizona District to better understand food-related threats to the health of native tribes in the district. I gained valuable experience in food safety as well as other aspects of environmental health because of this experience. The variety of activities completed is a positive aspect of the JRCOSTEP program, as it allows students to determine their specific interests related to environmental health practice.

I enjoyed all of the activities I completed this summer as an EHO JRCOSTEP. I improved my knowledge of environmental health topics and gained practical experience. I found the food safety inspections and the health and safety inspections most engaging because of the opportunity to interact with the community and educate individuals on best practices. Another highlight of my experience was participating in a rabies virus vaccination clinic that took place throughout the Hopi Reservation. Because of this clinic, collaborated with the tribe to provide rabies vaccinations to almost 600 dogs and cats. Other services provided at the clinic were tick collaring of dogs, blood drawing for tick-borne disease research, and other vaccinations. I also enjoyed participating in a Rocky Mountain spotted fever prevention campaign on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. During this campaign, we completed activities such as checking dogs for ticks, providing tick collars, and providing educational materials on Rocky Mountain spotted fever.



My time as a JRCOSTEP with the Commissioned Corps involved not only interesting environmental health activities, but also the opportunity to travel and see new places. Before this summer, I had never been to Arizona. This experience allowed me to visit many incredible places and parks including Grand Canyon National Park, Petrified Forest National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Bryce Canyon National Park, and Antelope Canyon on Navajo Nation. The opportunity to travel and see a different region of the country is a major positive aspect of the JRCOSTEP, specifically working in the Eastern Arizona District with IHS. I would highly recommend the JRCOSTEP with the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and placement with IHS to students seeking internship opportunities in environmental health because of the wide variety

of environmental health activities completed, the dedication to public service, the opportunity to travel and see new places, and the supportive and passionate community of officers to work alongside. I sincerely enjoyed my JRCOSTEP experience, and I think that the development of a comprehensive orientation packet would be really helpful to incoming JRCOSTEPs. Despite the initial challenge of adjusting to a new place and culture, I was able to learn, grow, and enjoy my time with the Commissioned Corps. I could not be more grateful for the experience and those who guided, encouraged, and worked with me this past summer.