

ENS Wyatt Walters
JRCOSTEP Summer 2022
Missouri Southern State University
Rhineland District Office
Rhineland, Wisconsin

My name is Wyatt Walters and I am a student at Missouri Southern State University. This coming fall I will be starting my senior year and graduating in the spring with a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). For my school one of the requirements for the environmental health program is that students must complete an internship before graduating. This was a tough challenge mainly because of the fact that there are so many internships and it was hard to know which one to apply for. As I was looking and considering applying for internships my father, CAPT Danny Walters, told me about the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP). He told me what goes into the JRCOSTEP program and gave me a brief summary of what I would be doing. After thinking it over, I decided that this would be a great opportunity and applied.

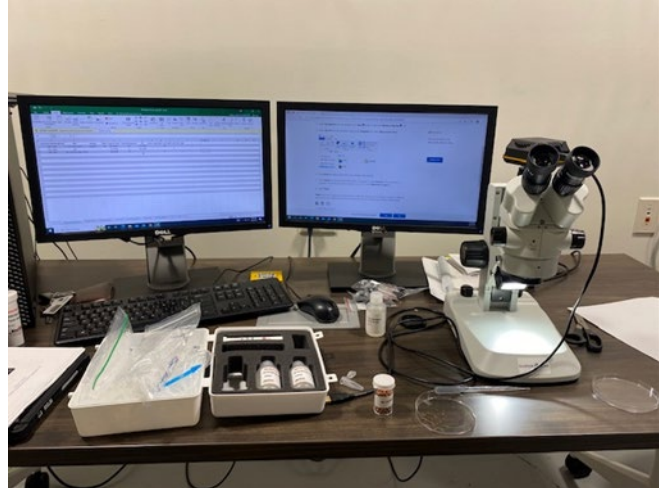


I applied in August of 2021 and was told that I had been accepted in January of 2022. Shortly after that I was informed that I would be stationed in Rhineland, WI. This was a little intimidating for me because I have never been that far north before. The Rhineland District Office falls under the Indian Health Service, Bemidji Area Office and serves tribes in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. My preceptor Barry Hugo and I tend to work more with the tribes in northern Wisconsin and northern Michigan.

One of the main things that made this externship so valuable is the on the job experience I gained. I was a little worried that I might just be stuck in an office all day doing somebody else's paperwork, but that wasn't the case at all. By my second day I was out in the field working with some of our other IHS employees and that is how I spent a majority of my time. This was great because I got the opportunity to apply what I've learned as an EHS major into real world situations. Some of the work I have done during my JRCOSTEP are food service sanitation surveys, vector surveillance and public safety work. Most of the work involved food safety. I did a lot of inspections, temporary food inspections and other things along those lines. After a while I was able to go out and do those things independently. The experience I gained from that work is more than I imagined and I am very grateful.

Along with the experience and independent work I was assigned a "summer project" while I was here. The project was tick and mosquito surveillance and identification. For this project my main objective was to collect ticks and mosquitos. For the mosquitos we would use a CDC light trap or a CDC light trap with CO2 as an attractant to catch them. Once caught I would take them back, count them and identify them based on what species they were. After that I would then use

a “Virus Antigen Panel Assay” kit to test them for West Nile virus, St. Louis encephalitis virus, and Eastern equine encephalitis virus. Then once the test was complete I would log them onto a data sheet. Then for the ticks we would perform tick drags. Which is simply running a thick cloth along grassy areas and as it comes by the tick latches on. From there I would pick them off and put them into a vile of ethyl alcohol which kills them. Then I take them back and identify their species and sex, then I log them into a data sheet. For ticks we are mainly looking for deer ticks since they’re carriers of Lyme disease. This project was a good opportunity for some hands-on field work that I could do on my own.



One of my favorite parts about this externship was the location. I love being outside and I especially love being in the woods. Almost every day we were somewhere different and along with that I got to see some amazing forest. Along with that I got to dabble in some northern fishing. It’s safe to say that this place never got old to look at.

Overall my experience this summer was one I couldn’t have expected. From the first day everyone in the office was making me feel like one of them. I was very grateful for this opportunity and everything that came with it. Though I am ready to head back home and see my family part of me will miss Rhinelander, WI.

