

**ENS Veronica Neujahr  
JRCOSTEP Summer 2023  
Colorado State University  
Minnesota District Office  
Bemidji, Minnesota**



My name is Veronica Neujahr and I am an undergraduate student in the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University (CSU). In the fall, I will begin my senior year and I anticipate graduating in May 2024 with a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences with a concentration in Environmental Public Health. I first heard about the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) from my academic advisor, Erin Reichert, who encouraged me to apply because she thought it would be a good fit and align with my career goals. I was enticed by the opportunity to live in a different state and push myself outside of my comfort zone. I have lived in Colorado for a majority of my life and I wanted to see a different part of the country. Erin connected me with an alumni of the program who did the JRCOSTEP. After our conversation, I was excited about the opportunity to learn more about environmental health and myself with this experience.

Around November, I began receiving calls from the Indian Health Service, Bemidji Area Office. I spoke with CAPT Tim Duffy and LTJG Katherine Miller and they both shared some information about the area and asked about my interests and goals. We also discussed what my JRCOSTEP assignment was going to look like and that I was placed in the Minnesota District Office in Bemidji, MN with LTJG Katherine Miller as my preceptor. The Minnesota District Office is part of the IHS Bemidji Area, which covers MI, WI, and MN. LTJG Katherine Miller predominantly works in Minnesota and serves some tribes in WI too.



A majority of my work was focused on food safety and institutional environmental health surveys to ensure the establishments were in working order, but I found many opportunities to experience other aspects of the job. One of my projects involved restarting the vector surveillance program with LTJG Katherine Miller. We had to test and replace some equipment, but worked to provide materials to make the vector surveillance program as straightforward as possible. In addition, I collaborated with CAPT Tim Duffy, CDR William Crump, and LTJG Katherine Miller to connect Environmental Health Officers with healthcare workers through a referral system. I am very fortunate to be a part of this group because it ties directly with my future career goals of becoming a physician that considers the environment and how it impacts the patients I serve. I helped create sample referral forms, a fact sheet to provide to healthcare facilities that are interested in starting the program, and develop a framework for what the pilot program will look like. It is exciting to know that while I may not see the end result during my time in Bemidji, I am helping leave a legacy to help improve the quality of life of others.

Reflecting on everything I did this summer, I would not trade it for any other opportunity. I learned a lot about how I operate in a professional setting and it helped further facilitate why I want to become a physician. This experience focused on the importance of connecting with people and seeing the world from their perspective. It further proved my beliefs that building trust and connection between people is what leads to progress. The skills I learned from this summer are going to follow me for the rest of my life. I was working a lot of the time, but still got to explore a lot of MN on my weekends off. Another extern and myself did a lot of hiking, day trips to cities, and attended events within the town of Bemidji. My favorite trips were those along the North Shore of Lake Superior because the views were breathtaking with all of the cliffs and various lakes in that region.

To anyone considering this experience, I would recommend that they apply and keep an open mind with all of the opportunities that come with it because you never know what you might learn about yourself. Being a JRCOSTEP was a very rewarding experience and I think that I will be a better physician and person because of it.