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JRCOSTEP - Summer 2007
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I first heard about the COSTEP program from a friend who knew I wanted to pursue a career in Public Health. Until then, I didn't know much about the United States Public Health Service. Once I found out about the COSTEP program, I immediately knew it was something I wanted to do.



North Fork White River Canyon

I applied and was stationed in Whiteriver, Arizona to work with the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). When I first heard that I would be working in Arizona, I thought I would be living in the desert for the summer. Much to my surprise, I found myself in the White Mountains. I lived off the reservation in the town of Pinetop, and had a beautiful drive through the trees every day.

Everyone in the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering at the Whiteriver Service Unit was very welcoming and helped make my transition into the internship easier. My preceptor, Jeff Severn, gave me many opportunities to experience the broad work of an Environmental Health Officer in the Indian Health Service.



Testing water at the Hon-Dah Pool

While working in Whiteriver, I was able to gain valuable skills in environmental health. I taught five food handler classes, conducted several occupational restraint surveys to gather rates on the usage of seat belts and car seats, created an educational pamphlet on correct sanitization solutions, conducted a food survey at the Hawley Lake Store and a pool survey at the Hon-Dah Resort and Casino, participated in medical chart abstractions to gather data for injury prevention, conducted water quality

assurance testing of an EPA certified water laboratory, and helped with animal bite investigations to determine if there was a risk of rabies transmission. I also collaborated with the WMAT Game & Fish Department to conduct campground surveys in attempt to show a need for campground development. This was a very enjoyable task for me, as I got to see many of the campgrounds on the

reservation, such as Hawley Lake, which has been described as a small Lake Tahoe. I took part in the Whiteriver Head Start health screening as part of a fluoride educational project. I distributed surveys on water usage and fluoride knowledge to parents of Head Start students. I also helped the dentists identify good candidates for a fluoride educational calendar. I took pictures of these candidates for use in the calendar. I loved interacting with the students and their families. Additionally, I surveyed food vendors at the 10th annual Pow Wow in the Pines. That was my first Pow Wow, and it was a memorable experience. I even tried some acorn stew!

Perhaps my favorite activity of the summer was the rabies vaccination clinic. A lot of time was spent preparing for the clinic in order to raise as much awareness about it as possible. I traveled all over the reservation to distribute flyers in schools, gas stations, stores, etc. I assisted the Senior Whiteriver Environmental Health Officer with recording Public Service Announcements and conducting a radio call-in program on KNNB, the WMAT radio station, to raise awareness about the presence of rabies and our vaccination clinic. The vaccination clinic was a success, and over six hundred dogs and cats were vaccinated. We also distributed tick collars to every dog to help prevent the transmission of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. After the clinic concluded, I entered all the records into the rabies vaccination database, which will help with animal bite investigations in the future.



Even though I stayed busy in Whiteriver, I was able to travel to two different reservations. I traveled to the Hopi Reservation with the District Environmental Health Officer to assist with an animal bite investigation and provide consultations about the requirements for a basic food service facility. The Hopi tribe is very traditional and it was rewarding to have a chance to experience a bit of their culture. I also was able to travel to the San Carlos Apache Reservation to conduct several campground surveys. It was an interesting change of scenery and I got to see my first saguaro cactus! I also did some traveling around Arizona when I wasn't working. I was able to see the Grand Canyon, hike in Sedona, camp at Big Lake, shop in Flagstaff, and explore the Pinetop area.

I am glad that I decided to apply for a COSTEP position. I was able to experience a broad spectrum of environmental health issues and I was able to experience a different culture at the same time. I would recommend the COSTEP program to anyone who is adventurous and interested in pursuing a career in environmental health.