

**WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY
POSITION DESCRIPTION**

Term position (up to August 2025) associated with the SARS-CoV-2 Participatory Animal Surveillance in Alaska (SPASAK) project

Title: Social Science Investigator, SPASAK Project

Department and Program: WCS Arctic Beringia Program

Position Location: Alaska, with potential for synergies in Fairbanks or Anchorage

Position Type: Full-Time fixed term position (up to August 2025)

Reports To: Arctic Beringia Regional Director, with dotted line to Director of Health Research

Coordinates with: SPASAK Project PIs and partners

Deadline to apply: Applications open until filled; start date anticipated on or before 1 January 2024

Planned trips: Regular (monthly) travel to project communities, as needed project meetings and scientific conferences.

Organizational Background:

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is a US non-profit, tax-exempt, private organization established in 1895 that saves wildlife and wild places by understanding critical issues, crafting science-based solutions, and taking conservation actions that benefit nature and humanity. With more than a century of experience, long-term commitments in dozens of landscapes, presence in more than 60 nations, and experience helping to establish over 150 protected areas across the globe, WCS has amassed the biological knowledge, cultural understanding, and partnerships to ensure that vibrant, wild places and wildlife thrive alongside local communities. Working with local communities and organizations, that knowledge is applied to address species, habitat, and ecosystem management issues critical to improving the quality of life of poor rural people whose livelihoods depend on the direct utilization of natural resources.

Program Overview:

The WCS Health Program is central to delivering our mission to save wildlife and wild places around the globe. Wildlife, livestock, and human diseases will likely have a significant impact on the future development of sustainable land uses, protected areas, transboundary natural resource management, other biodiversity conservation approaches, and livelihood opportunities in many of the landscapes and seascapes where we work. Our work at the interface of wildlife, domestic animal, and human health has demonstrated that a One Health approach can build new constituencies for conservation and strengthen existing ones, while mitigating a key threat to conservation. Health is one of WCS' key cross-cutting thematic programs, and a focus in the 2030 strategy, in recognition that a dynamic, transdisciplinary One Health approach is relevant across all the landscapes, seascapes, and regions where we work.

Program Background:

The overarching objective of the SPASAK project is to pilot participatory SARS-CoV-2 animal surveillance with underserved Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Alaska using approaches that empower these communities to fully participate in disease surveillance (hunted animals, peri-domestic small mammals, domestic dogs, and wastewater), investigations, result communication, and potential response measures. Integrating social science methods will support the co-development of a scientifically, socially, and culturally acceptable surveillance system, from sampling to communication of findings, to participatory investigations on spillover mechanisms and interventions. Combining Indigenous knowledge with scientific understanding improves wildlife surveillance and advances Indigenous Peoples' self-determination in research, while creating mutual animal and human health benefits. Given past negative impacts on health determinants of Indigenous communities as a result of poorly designed outreach and communication on contaminants in traditional foods, attention will be given to safeguarding the cultural,

socioeconomic, and nutritional dimensions of Indigenous rights and food security when discussing, studying, and addressing zoonotic risks.

To address this transboundary challenge our team brings together leading experts on community-based wildlife surveillance from the U.S. and Canada. We will supplement focal community SARS-CoV-2 surveillance with opportunistic animal testing (archival samples, stranding events, wildlife management, working dogs, and research studies). Wildlife and domestic dogs will be screened for SARS-CoV-2 RNA (swab samples) and SARS-CoV-2 antibodies (blood/sera) to assess SARS-CoV-2 presence/absence and exposure and estimate apparent prevalence. Full sequencing of genomes from RNA positives will identify variants and analyze mutational signatures and phylogenies for epidemiological links. Implementation of cost-effective wastewater surveillance with communities will identify trends in positivity and monitor for emergence and circulation of SARS-CoV-2 variants. The target audience is underserved Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations living along a rural-to-peri-urban gradient in boreal and Arctic biomes of Alaska, as well as local, state, and federal agencies and researchers spanning the human, animal, and environmental sectors working to understand the implications of SARS-CoV-2 in wildlife.

Position Description:

WCS seeks a social science investigator to lead on a participatory community research project focused on wildlife disease surveillance in the Alaskan Arctic for the SARS-CoV-2 Participatory Animal Surveillance in Alaska (SPASAK). Ideal candidates will have experience working in and with Alaska Native communities on issues related to food security and wildlife health along with interests in co-production of knowledge, weaving Indigenous and western science, qualitative and quantitative research methods, and applying social science to conservation contexts. This position will work closely with the Postdoctoral Surveillance Coordinator, SPASAK Project (see separate job description). WCS is partnering with the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), the North Slope Borough (NSB), and WCS Canada on the project, which is supported through a USDA APHIS American Rescue Plan: SARS-CoV-2 in Animals cooperative agreement. The Principal Investigator (PI) on the project is Dr. Sarah Olson (WCS Health), with Co-PIs as follows: Dr. Eric Bortz (UAA); Dr. Amanda Bishop (UAA); Dr. Cristina Hansen (UAF); and Dr. Raphaela Stimmelmayer (NSB).

The Social Science Investigator will work on a participatory community research project focused on wildlife disease surveillance across Alaska. The Investigator will collaborate with community members, local and state agencies, and other partners to co-design a project, implement research activities, and support the development of capacity and knowledge-sharing mechanisms for sustainable and equitable community-led research. This position requires a range of skills, including trans-disciplinary teamwork, data collection and analysis, and an understanding of drivers of emerging infectious diseases of wildlife origin, including the importance of integrating the social and public health implications. Depending on qualifications, this position will receive graduate student or research affiliate status at UAA/UAF.

A wide variety of backgrounds will be considered. The position and project can be adapted to the candidate's educational level, experience, and interests. We encourage individuals with experience living in Alaska Native communities and/or working closely with Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous knowledge systems to apply.

The Social Science Investigator will be fully funded for 2 years, with possible extension. Salary will be commensurate with the candidates' experience and qualifications.

Principal Responsibilities:

In consultation and coordination with the WCS's Arctic Beringia Regional Director, Social Scientist, and Director of Health Research as well as project partners:

- In collaboration with communities, government agencies, and other partners, apply social science methodologies to co-design, research, and implement a participatory research project around wildlife disease surveillance and weaving Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. The project can be adapted to candidate and community interests, but a possible focus is understanding wildlife disease and social/public health implications through both Indigenous and Western lenses (e.g., a Two-Eyed Seeing approach)
- Contribute to the development of technical protocols for sample and data collection and submission of related IACUC and IRB applications.
- Support the Postdoctoral Surveillance Coordinator of the SPASAK Project in strategic surveillance research to help the SPASAK project meet the following sub-objectives to conduct animal surveillance for SARS-CoV-2. These objectives include implementation of participatory community surveillance of wild/domestic animals and wastewater, as well as development of state-wide opportunistic and archival surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in wildlife.
- Ensure human research implementation follows the highest international standards in ethics and social safeguarding mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP and LCs).
- Standardize data collection and management. Learn data analyses to support project deliverables. Analyze and synthesize social science data and generate evidence and recommendations for improving wildlife disease surveillance and management in the Alaskan Arctic. Communicate research findings to relevant stakeholders and audiences.
- Support the development of capacity and knowledge-sharing mechanisms for community-led wildlife disease surveillance, including through engagement, training, and mentoring of community members and partners.
- Publish research results in peer-reviewed journals and present at relevant conferences and meetings. Contribute other media products for popular audiences regarding this project, wildlife health, public health, and conservation.
- Support technical reports relevant to the project in a timeframe and format as required by USDA APHIS.
- Participate in project coordination calls, and project-related public speaking and public relations work.
- Develop and build collaborative relationships in Alaska, and the region, to promote multidisciplinary approaches to wildlife conservation and meet wildlife health challenges. Contribute to the development of proposals and funding applications for future research and capacity-building activities related to wildlife disease surveillance and management in the Alaskan Arctic.
- Other related duties as assigned.

Job requirements:

- Ideal candidates should have at least a Bachelor's degree or equivalent with 1-2 years of relevant field/research experience (paid or unpaid) in social science, wildlife conservation, public health, epidemiology, environmental science, interdisciplinary science, or a related field. Candidates with graduate degrees in a relevant field who seek additional research experience are welcome.
- Experience or a strong interest in qualitative and quantitative social science data collection and analysis.

- Preferred experience living in Alaska Native communities and/or working closely with Indigenous residents and leaders. Ideally with educational, research, or lived experience related to food security, wildlife/animal disease, and/or community health programs.
- Ability to multi-task and engage with a multidisciplinary international team.
- Comfortable working in complex traditional and diverse cultural settings; an ability to adapt approaches to local cultures and project situations, while maintaining a high professional standard.
- Strong interpersonal, organizational, and time-management skills.
- English fluency (written and spoken). Ability to speak Iñupiaq, Yup'ik, Łingít, or other Alaska Native language is a plus.
- The willingness to work flexible hours that may include weekends and public holidays.
- The willingness and ability to travel to remote field sites in both countries, and occasionally other locations e.g. laboratories or conferences, as needed to meet project deliverables.
- Respect for WCS's goal, mission, and vision, and an ability to integrate WCS Core Values (respect, accountability & transparency, innovation, diversity, equity, & inclusion, collaboration, and integrity) into your work.

WCS is an equal opportunity employer, and the organization complies with all employment and labor laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination in hiring and ensures that candidates from all backgrounds are fairly and consistently considered during the recruitment process. We are dedicated to hiring and supporting a diverse workforce. We are committed to cultivating an inclusive work environment and look for future team members who share that same value.

The organization provides equal employment opportunities for all qualified candidates. The organization does not discriminate for employment based on age, color, disability, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by laws and regulations.