

NRM CAP – Amanda Kruse

Go for it!

This was my mantra for the Natural Resources Management (NRM) Career Assignment Program (CAP) detail. I had always been interested in the NRM CAP and knew at some point in my career that I wanted to apply for it, but every year the announcement came out and it just wasn't the "right time." After 2020, I realized there was never going to be a "right time" and decided to go for it.

My detail was a little unconventional being all virtual, but the overall experience was the same as every CAP's, AMAZING! Even virtually, I got so much exposure to projects, people, teams, and organizations that I had never worked with before. I learned so much more about the USACE and how far-reaching our impact truly is. I worked on projects I had never heard of or even knew the USACE worked on. From the Shoreline Management Program (which we don't have in the St. Louis District) to Job Aids, NRM Awards, and memos, every day was an adventure. I embraced the challenges and the craziness knowing the NRM team always had my back. There were times I was in over my head and didn't know exactly what I was doing, but I always went back to my same mantra, go for it!

The people that I worked with really are what made my CAP experience so memorable. Every day I was emailing someone new about a project or an issue and, even virtually, I could feel the passion they had for their program and their willingness to help was unmatched. While I didn't get to meet all of the Headquarters team in person, the entire NRM team (Tom Smith, Meg Gaffney-Smith, Jeff Krause, Steve Austin, Heath Kruger, Jeremy Crossland, Roseana Burick, Heather Burke, Scott Strotman, Mike Riegert, Pam Doty, Liz Quillen, and Lauren Sparks) went above and beyond to make me feel welcomed and included. From chats with Steve to check-ins with Jeremy, even miles away I felt like I was working side by side with them.

One of my favorite projects during my CAP detail was helping to coordinate Steve Austin's retirement ceremony. I loved getting to know more about Steve and learning all that he accomplished throughout his career. I even found out that we both worked at Carlyle Lake! I was so glad to be a small part of such an important day for him and his family.

Overall, working for Headquarters as the NRM CAP helped me better understand how what I do in my everyday job fits into the overall USACE missions. I always think that working at a higher level in an organization helps someone better understand how they fit into the organization and the NRM CAP was the perfect opportunity to expand my knowledge and understanding to help give my normal work a deeper meaning. I also realized the amount of time, work, and dedication that it takes for something that I thought of as simple to get done; a memo doesn't get approved overnight!

I wouldn't change my experience as the NRM CAP for anything. I was just as involved, just as busy, and learned just as much as if I would have been there in person. So, for anyone thinking about applying for the NRM CAP, I have three words of advice.... GO FOR IT!