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Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Office of Land Management  
Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site  
30 Ramey Drive  
Collinsville, IL 62234

Dear Department of Natural Resources Human Resources Department,

I am delighted in applying for the Conservation Education Representative position with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. With over a decade of experience as a historian, educator, and public history professional, I specialize in designing dynamic, research-driven programs that make history accessible to diverse audiences. I earned a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri (2024), complemented by certifications in public history and geographic information science. Through hands-on interpretive programs, digital history initiatives, and direct community engagement, I have helped connect visitors to the significance of historical landscapes in Illinois and beyond. I look forward to applying these skills to generating interpretive materials on the Cahokia site, ensuring that visitors not only engage with history but develop a deeper understanding of its lasting impact.

My public-facing work has centered on making history accessible and engaging through interactive programming guided by my background and experience in Special Education, digital humanities, and historical preservation efforts. In these roles I developed and led educational programs, interpretive tours, and interactive historical exhibits that bring the past to life in both in-person and digital formats. While teaching ancient history at McKendree University, I brought my students to Cahokia on a site visit as part of a project contextualizing the cultural and trade significance of Mississippian societies across North America.

In my role as project lead at *Madison Historical*, a regional digital archive, I trained and supervised undergraduates who worked with community partners and K-12 schools as part of a community outreach initiative. Through hands-on training for educator-historians in public history, including equipment handling (cameras and scanners), communicating an institutional narrative to the public in person and online through collections on *Madison Historical*. Such experience strengthened my ability to generate informative content and labels as well as train educators in translating complex historical research into accessible, engaging content.

In addition to my expertise in public history, I have a strong foundation in teaching about prehistory in education and interpretation. My experience in historic preservation, research on early American history, background in geography and museum studies, and experience teaching has furthered my interdisciplinary research around knowledge exchange, science, and Indigenous ecology, as material and social history into historic site programming. Through the design and installation of exhibitions and content creation I have a proven track record of communicating historical and cultural interpretation

programming, such as a redesign of several local history museums docent manuals. I have ample experience writing accessible jargon free language for introductory student in addition to digital collections and blog style encyclopedia articles for Madison Historical Digital Archive. I look forward to continuing to develop materials for visitors and special interest groups, to ensure visitors gain context or stronger understanding of our shared past.

My prior work in historic preservation and community outreach also reflects my strong background in generating rich content and interpretation through collaboration and engagement with the public. As an executive board member of the O'Fallon Historic Preservation Commission, I have contributed research and consulted on several National Register of Historic Places and Landmark nomination projects, public history initiatives, and educational outreach programs that connect St. Louis Metro East communities to their historical landscapes. Likewise, my work as a faculty mentor at McKendree University and the University of Missouri included guiding students in historical interpretation and hands-on skills that directly translate to developing educational programming and leading visitor engagement initiatives at Illinois historic sites. Additionally, my experience preparing reports and maintaining educational records on historic preservation and educational projects has provided me with strong documentation and administrative skills essential to the role of Conservation Education Representative.

Additionally, my experience in public speaking, volunteer training, and community outreach aligns closely with the responsibilities of this role. As a member of the O'Fallon, Illinois Historic Preservation Commission, I trained community volunteers in historical research. These experiences in volunteerism, training and educational outreach as much as my content knowledge of early American history are directly transferable to the Conservation Education Representative role, ensuring engaging and research-driven interpretation for public audiences.

My experience in curriculum development further supports my ability to design engaging, research-based programming. I have an expert level of knowledge about North American history from pre-history to de-industrialization, borderland, environmental history, and historical methods. My commitment to education extends beyond the classroom. I have led continuing education programs and professional development workshops, guiding students in historical interpretation and hands-on archival research, skills that translate directly to further developing and communicating public programming and visitor engagement initiatives at Illinois historic sites.

This role offers a unique opportunity to preserve and interpret the state's diverse cultural heritage. I am eager to contribute to this mission by developing public programs that highlight the historical and contemporary relevance of these sites. Whether through guided tours, hands-on workshops, digital initiatives, or community partnerships, I look forward to enhancing visitor engagement and fostering a deeper appreciation for Illinois' past.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my background and experience align with the needs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and its historic sites and how I can further contribute. I look forward to the possibility of contributing to the state's educational and interpretive initiatives and helping visitors connect with the rich history of Illinois.

Sincerely,  
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.