

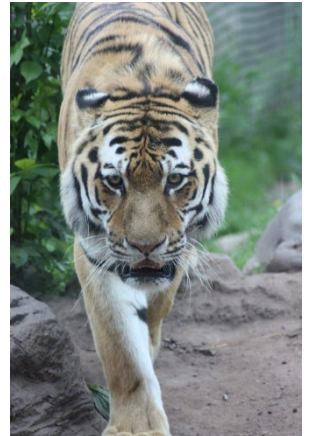
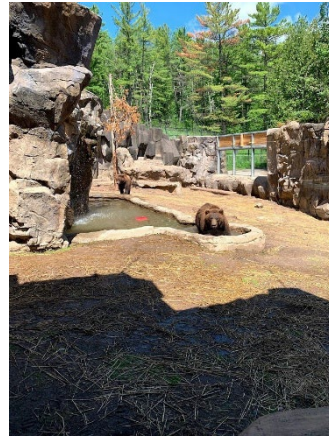
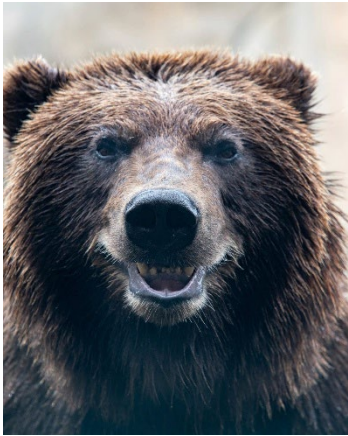
2026 LAKE SUPERIOR  
ZOO CAPITAL  
INVESTMENT  
REQUEST



# The Lake Superior Zoo



Established in 1923 as the 19th oldest zoo in the United States, the Lake Superior Zoo is the only AZA-accredited zoological facility serving Greater Minnesota. Operating on a historic campus in Duluth, the zoo provides specialized care for over 300 animals representing more than 140 species while welcoming over 100,000 visitors annually to our 19-acre campus. Beyond recreation, it functions as a vital educational and economic anchor for the Arrowhead region, offering hands-on STEM learning and accessible wildlife experiences to families and rural school districts throughout the northland.

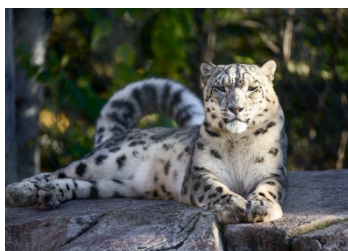


## PREPARED BY

Noah Hobbs  
Lake Superior Zoo

[nhobbs@lszoo.org](mailto:nhobbs@lszoo.org)  
[www.lszoo.org](http://www.lszoo.org)

218-251-4627



# Lake Superior Zoo 2026 Capital Investment Request

## Securing the Future of Greater Minnesota's Zoo

Established in 1923 as the 19th oldest zoo in the United States, the Lake Superior Zoo is the only AZA-accredited zoological facility serving Greater Minnesota. Operating on a historic campus in Duluth, the zoo provides specialized care for over 300 animals representing more than 140 species while welcoming upwards of 100,000 visitors annually. Beyond recreation, it functions as a vital educational and economic anchor for the Arrowhead region, offering hands-on STEM learning and accessible wildlife experiences to families and rural school districts throughout the northland.

Operating a century-old zoo in Duluth's extreme climate strains aging infrastructure. Current structural deterioration poses severe life-safety risks to animals and creates exceedingly high utility costs.

- **Systems Past Life Expectancy:** Multiple primary HVAC climate control units are over 30 years old. A failure in a tropical or aquatic habitat during winter is a life-safety emergency for rare animals.
- **Electrical Capacity Deficits:** The current electrical infrastructure was not designed to handle sustained, high-amperage modern electrical loads for advanced aquatic filtration and complex veterinary equipment.
- **Habitat Containment Failure:** The concrete basins in the tiger, bear, and otter habitats are experiencing structural cracking and active water loss due to freeze-thaw cycles, wasting thousands of gallons of municipal water and undermining foundational integrity.

## A \$6 Million Proactive Investment

This funding targets shovel ready, back of house essentials and accessibility improvements to ensure the zoo remains a safe, accredited institution.

**\$1.2M – Commercial HVAC and Electrical Modernization** Multiple primary climate control units are over 30 years old, and the current electrical grid was not designed for sustained, high-amperage loads. This funding replaces failing units with high-efficiency climate control and upgrades electrical panels to provide environmental stability and mitigate fire risks.

**\$1.7M – Animal Wellness and Specialized Infrastructure** To manage health risks and maintain animal welfare, this funding upgrades aging infrastructure into modern quarantine and treatment facilities. This includes modernizing spaces for safe handling and veterinary response while addressing air quality needs by upgrading ventilation systems across three separate buildings. Specific improvements involve exterior shell work to the nocturnal habitat to ensure climate containment and structural integrity, as well as the installation of a dedicated water line for the caribou exhibit to provide a reliable supply for hydration and habitat maintenance.

\$3.6M – Site Safety, Heritage Conservation, and Structural Repairs This allocation focuses on the foundational integrity of the facility, public accessibility, and the preservation of assets. Funding will be used to seal leaking concrete basins in the tiger, bear, and otter habitats to prevent foundational damage and to repave asphalt pathways while updating ADA accessible doors on public buildings to meet compliance standards. Additionally, the project repairs parking lot curbing to reduce trip hazards, replaces fences and gates to maintain perimeter security, and provides tuck pointing for WPA bluestone bridges to maintain these historic structures and prevent masonry degradation.

### **Regional Equity and Education**

State funding ensures equitable access to hands-on biological sciences for rural school districts across the Iron Range and Northern Minnesota, removing the barrier of a multi-hour and likely untenable trip to the Twin Cities metro.

### **Public Health and Accessibility**

According to the One Health framework, unstructured time outside in environments like accredited zoos provides measurable health benefits, including reducing stress and aiding emotional development. Upgrading our pathways ensures these health benefits are accessible to all Minnesotans, regardless of physical mobility as well as safety to prevent trips and falls.

### **Proactive Fiscal Responsibility**

Replacing failing infrastructure now is a critical act of cost avoidance. A mechanical failure during a Duluth winter would trigger potentially massive emergency costs. This investment lowers ongoing utility burdens and prevents a costly financial emergency for taxpayers.

## Historical State Investment (1992–2025)

The current \$6 million request addresses decades of deferred maintenance, representing a necessary generational investment compared to previous piecemeal funding.

Session Year	Allocation
1992	\$300,000
1998	\$1,300,000
2006	\$600,000
2010	\$200,000
2018	\$1,900,000
2020	\$204,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,504,000</b>



### GENERAL

- Information/Admissions
- ATM
- Elevators
- Emergency/First Aid
- Restrooms
- Wheelchairs available

### AMENITIES

- Barnyard feedings
- Zoo Train (ADA accessible)
- Playground
- Gift Shop
- Café

### FACILITIES

- A** Zoo Central (Main Building)  
Entrance & exit, animal exhibits, Orsgard classroom, Griggs Learning Center, gift shop, café, restrooms
- B** Zoo School  
STAFF ONLY - Lake Superior Zoo School
- C** Australia Building  
Animal exhibits
- D** Willard Munger Animal Care Center  
STAFF ONLY
- E** Primate Conservation Center  
Animal exhibits, photo booth, restrooms
- F** Nocturnal Building  
Animal exhibits

\*Please stay on designated guest pathways.