

Securing the Future of Greater Minnesota's Zoo

The Lake Superior Zoo, established in 1923 as the 19th oldest zoo in the United States, is the only AZA accredited zoological facility serving Greater Minnesota. Operating on a historic 19-acre campus in Duluth, the zoo provides specialized care for over 300 animals and serves as a vital STEM educational anchor for the Arrowhead region. However, operating a century old facility in an extreme climate has strained infrastructure past its life expectancy, creating structural deterioration that poses safety risks and high utility costs. This \$6 million proactive investment addresses decades of deferred maintenance through a generational investment in shovel ready, and the back of house essentials to ensure the zoo remains a safe, accredited institution.

\$2.2M – Commercial HVAC and Environmental Modernization

This funding replaces failing, 30 year old climate control units with high efficiency systems and upgrades electrical panels to provide environmental stability and mitigate fire risks. This category also addresses biosafety and air quality by upgrading ventilation systems across three separate buildings as well as our pre-school. It includes modernizing specialized spaces for safe animal handling and rapid veterinary response to manage health risks and maintain welfare standards.

\$3.8M – Site Safety, Heritage Conservation, and Structural Repairs

This allocation focuses on foundational integrity, public accessibility, and the preservation of historic assets. Funding will seal leaking concrete basins in the tiger, bear, and otter habitats to prevent foundational damage and conserve water. Infrastructure updates include exterior shell work to the nocturnal habitat and the installation of a dedicated water line for the caribou exhibit. To meet compliance standards and reduce liability, the project repaves asphalt pathways, updates ADA accessible doors on public buildings, and repairs parking lot curbing. Finally, it provides tuck pointing for WPA bluestone bridges and replaces failing fences to maintain perimeter security.

Regional Impact and Fiscal Responsibility State funding ensures equitable access to biological sciences for rural school districts, removing the barrier of long trips to the Twin Cities. Replacing this infrastructure now is a critical act of cost avoidance, as a mechanical failure during a Duluth winter would trigger massive emergency costs for taxpayers.