



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-373

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 26, 2026

Project Title: Lake Sturgeon Restoration at Great Lakes Aquarium

Project Budget: \$500,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Jay Walker

Organization: Lake Superior Authority

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Web Address: www.glaquarium.org

Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 17, 2026

Reporting Schedule: April 1 / October 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2029

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2029

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2026, Chp. 104, Sec. 2, Subd. 06i

Appropriation Language: \$500,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Lake Superior Authority to create a new lake-sturgeon-rearing program and educational grow-out exhibit at the Great Lakes Aquarium to advance restoration of lake sturgeon to the St. Louis River. Net income generated as part of this appropriation may be reinvested in the project if a plan for reinvestment is approved in the work plan as provided under Minnesota Statutes, section 116P.10.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2029

Narrative

Project Summary: Great Lakes Aquarium aims to restore lake sturgeon to the St. Louis River through a new exhibit and rearing program, encouraging community involvement in conservation activities.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Lake sturgeon are one of the Great Lakes' most iconic species. Once abundant in Lake Superior, they spawned in the St. Louis River, the lake's largest U.S. tributary. In the late 1800s, development and industry along the river threatened lake sturgeon populations. They were being overfished and faced habitat loss as feeding and spawning grounds became polluted or inaccessible after dam construction. By the early 1900s, their populations were extirpated. Despite decades of stocking lake sturgeon and restoring their habitats, population densities and spawning ratios remain below fishery management goals. Thus, regional states and provinces have designated lake sturgeon as a Species of Special Concern or Endangered Species. Ongoing fisheries restoration initiatives continue to work towards a genetically diverse self-sustaining population through lake-wide rearing and stocking programs.

Local stocking efforts have faced challenges over the years, including the availability of consistent resources to acquire and transport stock and fingerlings. Lake sturgeon currently stocked into the St. Louis River are reared on groundwater at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (Genoa, WI) or in a streamside trailer in Michigan. The Fond du Lac Band and MNDNR stock them in upstream and downstream locations, respectively.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) aims to advance lake sturgeon restoration through a new rearing program and grow-out exhibit, encouraging community involvement in conservation activities. This program and exhibit will reduce resource requirements of Federal, Tribal, and State partners while addressing a significant step in recovering these migratory fish to the St. Louis River – their journey home.

Rearing lake sturgeon in their natal waters can imprint them on cues in the water and help guide them back after years away in Lake Superior. St. Louis River Estuary water will be utilized in the rearing trailer and grow-out tank to mimic their natural habitat, optimizing juvenile sturgeon development and survival rates. Recent studies suggest their first two weeks of life may be particularly important for lake sturgeon imprinting.

GLA will engage the public indoors and out with lake sturgeon ecology, highlighting the importance of wildlife restoration, St. Louis River Estuary rehabilitation, and re-establishing a culturally significant population. Interpretive media and interactives aim to inspire a sense of stewardship and encourage community involvement in conservation activities. The current and historic work of Tribal and State entities will be woven throughout the exhibit and facility-wide programming for school groups and outreaches.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

This project furthers restoration initiatives and agreements by combining the restoration of native fish populations and place-based education by: installing a St. Louis River filtration system, creating a grow-out exhibit, and managing a streamside rearing trailer. This will supply 3,500 fingerlings annually to the MNDNR and FdLB St. Louis River stocking programs and engage more than 225,000 people annually with lake sturgeon ecology, cultural significance, and conservation efforts. Biosecurity is imperative optimize sturgeon development and imprinting while abating contaminants and aquatic invasive species in the water system and stocking transport water.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): NE

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Region(s): NE

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Grow out Exhibit and Water Filtration Construction

Activity Budget: \$500,000

Activity Description:

Finish construction of grow out exhibit gallery and install water filtration for grow out tank. Prepare the grow-out system to receive sturgeon from rearing trailer.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Complete Predesign Review with the Dept. Administration. Enrollment with MN B3 Tracking Tool. (Non-ENRTF)	January 31, 2026
Pre-Construction: Architectural drawings complete, Contractor selected, permits secured, and site preparation. (Non- ENRTF)	May 31, 2026
Pre- Construction: Construction funds legally secured	July 31, 2026
Construction: Construction, oversight, and administration begins	July 31, 2026
Construction: Substantial completion and construction oversight and administration ends.	November 30, 2026
Close Out: Certificate of occupancy, exhibit components installed, signage installed with ENRTF logo/language.	October 31, 2027
Close-Out: Notice of Funding Restrictions Recorded	October 31, 2027
Close-Out: Open for intended use	October 31, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dan Wilfond	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Duluth Area Fisheries Supervisor. Coordinate stocking efforts of lower St. Louis River with Sturgeon reared at Great Lakes Aquarium	No
Eric Torvinen	Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; Resource Management	Fisheries Program Manager. Coordinate stocking efforts of the Upper St. Louis River with sturgeon reared at the Great Lakes Aquarium.	No
Brandon Keesler	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Provide Hatchery trailer to Great Lakes Aquarium for rearing sturgeon	No

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

Dissemination Efforts

Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) will actively acknowledge the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) in all communications and outreach related to this project. This will include:

Exhibit Signage – Permanent, durable signage with the ENRTF logo and attribution language will be displayed at the Lake Sturgeon exhibit and in the sturgeon rearing facility viewing area. Temporary signage with ENRTF acknowledgment will be posted during the construction phase.

Printed and Digital Materials – All brochures, handouts, interpretive panels, and educational resources related to the project will include the ENRTF logo and required attribution language.

Media and Press Releases – Press releases, interviews, and media kits will identify the ENRTF as a funding source, and GLA staff will emphasize this funding during media interactions.

Website and Social Media – The project will be highlighted on GLA’s website and through social media platforms with attribution language, ENRTF logo placement, and tagging of ENRTF accounts.

Events and Public Programs – Public presentations, tours, and educational programs related to the Lake Sturgeon project will verbally acknowledge the ENRTF’s role in making the project possible.

Partnership Channels – Project partners, including the Minnesota DNR and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, will be encouraged to include ENRTF acknowledgment in their related communications.

These efforts will ensure that the citizens of Minnesota are informed about the ENRTF’s role in protecting and restoring the state’s natural resources, while also increasing public awareness and engagement in lake sturgeon conservation.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

The GLA operations budget will cover the continued management of capital assets associated with the facility, water system, exhibit, and interpretive media. GLA and funder match will cover seasonal rearing staff salaries. Additionally, in-kind support will be provided through cooperative agreements with the MNDNR and FdLB.

This project will establish St. Louis River rearing protocols and best practices for lake sturgeon, create a database for information sharing, produce annual rearing reports, develop training procedures for fisheries technicians, create educational interpretive media and facility-wide programming for school groups and public outreaches.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Phase 2 construction of grow-out tank and water filtration portion of hatchery				0		\$500,000
							Sub Total	\$500,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-

Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$500,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
Cash	ACH Legacy funding	Phase 1 construction of water filtration and grow out room.	Secured	\$400,000
			State Sub Total	\$400,000
Non-State				
Cash	Foundations/ Donations	Phase 1 and 2 of Water Filtration and Grow out room	Pending	\$276,000
Cash	City of Duluth	Phase 1 of Water Filtration for Hatchery and Grow out Room	Pending	\$200,000
Cash	Lake Superior Center Operation Funds	Planning and Project Management	Secured	\$122,500
			Non State Sub Total	\$598,500
			Funds Total	\$998,500

Total Project Cost: \$1,498,500

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [9505eb84-3ba.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Sturgeon Map and images....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Great Lakes Aquarium 990	96bcdd58-fbe.pdf
Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium 2023 Audit	38516d7a-483.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
GLA Board Resolution for Seeking LCCMR support for Rearing Lake Sturgeon	a2c18b3d-b31.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
FdLB Letter of Support	1c59bc10-8ec.pdf
1854 Treaty Letter of Support	6f70114b-d12.pdf
USFWS Letter of Support	29c91d98-132.pdf
Certificate of Good Standing	8729b835-489.pdf
Capital Project Questionnaire	9178a30d-e87.pdf
Capital Project Budget Addendum	4fd0b986-4e1.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

The proposal amount is \$525,000. The recommended amount is \$500,000. From the services category, we will reduce the size of the grow-out tank, which will also reduce the size of the filtration to make up for the reduction in budget.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

N/A

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

Yes

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

Yes

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF? If so, describe here (1) the source and estimated amounts of any revenue and (2) how you propose to use those revenues:

Yes, The purpose of this project is to support the Minnesota DNR and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in their conservation efforts and to create an exhibit that educates guests on the Lake Sturgeon's conservation and cultural significance. Revenue associated with the project would come from general ticket sales to the Aquarium. While it will be difficult to determine exactly how much of that revenue is attributable to this specific exhibit, as a nonprofit, all revenue is reinvested directly into the organization. These funds help cover costs outside the scope of this grant, such as utilities, animal care, and exhibit staffing.

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

Yes

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:

Katie Pease

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

Yes, I understand