



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-373

Proposal Title: Lake Sturgeon Restoration at Great Lakes Aquarium

Project Manager Information

Name: Jay Walker

Organization: Lake Superior Authority

Office Telephone: (218) 740-2011

Email: jwalker@glaquarium.org

Project Basic Information

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.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$525,000

Proposed Project Completion: November 30, 2027

LCCMR Funding Category: Fish and Wildlife (D)

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

Narrative

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.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Hatchery Staffing

Activity Budget: \$43,500

Activity Description:

Hatchery technicians are hired and trained to care for sturgeon.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hatchery Staffing	July 31, 2026

Activity 2: Rearing and Growout exhibit

Activity Budget: \$19,000

Activity Description:

Order supplies to care for sturgeon in rearing trailer and grow out exhibit. Order Sturgeon diet for rearing and growout.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Rearing and Grow out exhibit supplies	July 31, 2026

Activity 3: Phase 2 of Grow out Exhibit and Water Filtration Construction

Activity Budget: \$389,000

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
Phase 2 of Grow out Exhibit and Water Filtration Construction	October 31, 2026

Activity 4: Supply Sturgeon to MNDNR and FdLB and grow exhibit .

Activity Budget: \$30,000

Activity Description:

Great Lakes Aquarium will supply 2000 sturgeon to the MNDNR for stocking efforts in lower St. Louis River, 1500 fish to FdLB for stocking efforts in upper St. Louis and 100 sturgeon to the Great Lakes Aquarium Grow out Exhibit.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Supply Sturgeon to MNDNR and FdLB and Grow out Exhibit	October 31, 2026

Activity 5: Rear sturgeon for 2027 stocking efforts

Activity Budget: \$43,500

Activity Description:

Staff will rear sturgeon from egg to juveniles to be stocked in fall of 2027

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Rear Sturgeon for 2027	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

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.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jay Walker

Job Title: Executive Director

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Jay Walker has demonstrated strategic planning, fundraising, project management, and team development expertise. With a proven ability to build strong relationships with stakeholders, he excels in managing multi-source budgets and delivering innovative exhibit designs. His accomplishments include implementing impactful conservation programs and sustainability initiatives, alongside a robust background in aquatic animal care and life support systems. Mr. Walker is dedicated to advancing organizational missions through collaboration, public engagement, and effective leadership.

Organization: Lake Superior Authority

Organization Description:

Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization charged by the Minnesota legislature with the mission of delivering freshwater education. Since opening its doors in July 2000, the Aquarium has drawn visitors from local communities and around the country to explore diverse animal habitats. Today, we engage more than 225,000 visitors annually with freshwater conservation education through hands-on learning, play, and animal encounters. Some of the most memorable animal encounters are at the sturgeon touchpool. This experience introduces guests to seven different sturgeon species and their worldwide conservation challenges.

With 25 years of aquatic husbandry and educational expertise, GLA brings expert knowledge and program execution in fish development, biosecurity, data management, public education, and community engagement. The Aquarium has a proven track record of developing major exhibit projects with excellence and economy, keeping funds within the state and our community.

Mission: To engage and inspire, encouraging stewardship of wildlife and water.

Vision: Leading freshwater conservation by connecting all people to Lake Superior and the world's waters.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Curator of Aquatics		Hatchery Manager			27%	0.4		\$35,000
2 Hatchery Technician		Care and maintenance of Lake Sturgeon hatchery			7%	0.64		\$52,000
							Sub Total	\$87,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Phase 2 construction of grow-out tank and water filtration portion of hatchery				0		\$419,000
							Sub Total	\$419,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Water filtration equipment. Pump, sand filter, heat exchanger, UV filter and sump tank	Water filtration for Sturgeon Grow out tank					\$4,000
	Tools and Supplies	Zooplankton hatching jars, nets, water quality tests, airstones and tubing.	Tools needed to rear sturgeon.					\$1,000
	Tools and Supplies	Brine shrimp, blood Worms, Pacifica Krill.	Diet for rearing Sturgeon over two years.					\$14,000
							Sub Total	\$19,000
Capital Expenditures								
							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	\$525,000

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.	Potential	\$750,000
			State Sub Total	\$750,000
Non-State				
Cash	Foundations	Phase 1 and 2 of Water Filtration and Grow out room	Potential	\$170,000
Cash	City of Duluth	Phase 1 of Water Filtration for Hatchery and Grow out Room	Secured	\$100,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$270,000
			Funds Total	\$1,020,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,545,000

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

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
USFWS Letter of Support	29c91d98-132.pdf
1854 Treaty Letter of Support	6f70114b-d12.pdf
FdLB Letter of Support	1c59bc10-8ec.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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?

No

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

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

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 proposal:

Julie Marano

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