



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-599

Proposal Title: Project LEAP

Project Manager Information

Name: Lizzy Larson

Organization: Arrowhead Zoological Society

Office Telephone: (218) 461-3527

Email: llarson@lszoo.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Project LEAP (Local Ecosystem Amphibian Preservation) is a dedicated conservation initiative focused on the captive rearing and strategic reintroduction of native amphibians to restore local populations and enhance ecosystem biodiversity

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$260,000

Proposed Project Completion: July 31, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary 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?

Statewide

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.

The Blanchard's cricket frog is the only endangered amphibian in Minnesota and serves as a vital indicator of wetland health. Once common throughout the Midwest, habitat fragmentation and chemical runoff have caused this species to vanish from most of its northern range. Today, only a few isolated populations remain in Minnesota, leaving them highly vulnerable to local extinction. The Lake Superior Zoo is an AZA accredited facility positioned to lead recovery efforts through Project LEAP. This initiative bridges the gap between field monitoring and active restoration by establishing a head starting program to safeguard genetic diversity on site. A core component of Project LEAP is an interactive exhibit designed to highlight the environmental pressures facing this species. By showing the frog's life cycle and its role as a biological indicator, the display encourages conservation action. Visitors learn how to reduce chemical use, support wetland restoration, and engage in citizen science. While the future release of captive reared juveniles into protected wetlands is a long term goal, the immediate focus is securing the current population and educating the community. This approach ensures that scientific intervention is backed by a public ready to protect the natural heritage of Minnesota.

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.

Our proposed solution addresses the decline of the Blanchard's cricket frog by establishing Project LEAP at the Lake Superior Zoo. This initiative creates an on-site head-starting facility designed to stabilize Minnesota's only endangered amphibian. By rearing frogs through their high-mortality larval stages in a controlled environment, we can maintain the genetic diversity of the state's northernmost population.

While the future release of captive-reared juveniles into fortified wetlands is a long-term goal coordinated with the DNR, this funding specifically supports population resilience and public engagement. A central feature of the project is an interactive educational display that showcases the frog's life cycle and its role as a biological indicator of water quality.

The exhibit highlights how habitat loss and chemical runoff impact sensitive wetland ecosystems. It empowers visitors to take direct action through chemical reduction and participation in citizen science. This holistic approach ensures that the recovery of the Blanchard's cricket frog is driven by both scientific intervention and a community of informed environmental stewards. By bridging the gap between field monitoring and active recovery, Project LEAP secures a future for this vanishing species and protects the natural heritage of Minnesota.

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 achieves the public purpose of conserving Minnesota's natural resources by stabilizing the state's only endangered amphibian. Key outcomes include conservation and enhancement through an on-site facility to bypass high-mortality larval stages, directly increasing the number of Blanchard's cricket frogs reaching reproductive age for wild release. Protection involves partnering with the DNR to fortify high-priority wetlands. The project also secures genetic diversity and provides captive-reared juveniles to bolster populations. Furthermore, it integrates species education by highlighting the frog's unique life cycle, its role as a biological indicator of water quality, and the importance of preserving sensitive local micro habitats.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Project Leap Staffing

Activity Budget: \$180,000

Activity Description:

To ensure the survival of Minnesota's only endangered amphibian, the Lake Superior Zoo is establishing a dedicated recovery team within Project LEAP. This staffing model includes a lead keeper and two specialized keepers who are rigorously trained in the delicate husbandry required for the Blanchard's cricket frog. These professionals manage the daily care of eggs and tadpoles, focusing on maintaining genetic diversity in a controlled environment. Oversight is provided by the director of animal care, who allocates a portion of their time to ensure all protocols meet the highest standards of conservation science.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hatchery staff hired and trained	October 31, 2027

Activity 2: Amphibian Lab Repurpose

Activity Budget: \$28,000

Activity Description:

Repurpose a space at the Lake Superior Zoo into a frog hatchery room. This would entail purchase and installation of hatchery equipment, installation of a heat pump for independent climate control needed to raise Blanchard's cricket frog and any other local amphibian and reptile species

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hatchery Room Operational	December 31, 2027

Activity 3: Rearing and Release

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

Lake Superior Zoo staff will begin raising raising Blanchards cricket frogs in calendar year 2028 with release in early 2029 and begin another raising in mid 2029 and release at the end of 2029 or early 2030.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Successful rearing of frogs	June 30, 2028

Activity 4: Education Display

Activity Budget: \$2,000

Activity Description:

To address the decline of Minnesota's only endangered amphibian, the Lake Superior Zoo is introducing a specialized conservation display as part of Project LEAP. This on-campus exhibit serves as a window into our active recovery efforts, allowing visitors to observe the Blanchard's cricket frog while we maintain the genetic diversity of at-risk populations. By situating the rearing facility in a public-facing area, the zoo bridges the gap between behind-the-scenes science and community awareness.

The display features immersive signage designed to educate guests on the frog's unique life cycle and its role as a biological indicator of wetland health. These interpretive materials highlight the specific threats the species faces in Minnesota, such as habitat loss and chemical runoff. To inspire direct action, the signage provides clear steps for visitors to take, such as reducing pesticide use and supporting local restoration projects. By engaging the public with these vanishing residents, the zoo fosters a culture of stewardship. This initiative ensures that while the physical release of frogs occurs at a later date, the foundation for their survival is built today through a combination of expert husbandry and an informed, empowered community of conservationists.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Signage Printed	December 31, 2028
Display Functional	December 31, 2028

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.

Project results and data will be disseminated through a strategy targeting scientific partners and the Minnesota public. We will provide progress reports to the DNR and state agencies to document genetic health and larval survival rates. These findings will also be shared with the AZA community and professional conservation networks to refine practices for amphibian recovery. By presenting results at regional wildlife conferences, the project contributes to the body of knowledge regarding indicator species and wetland restoration. This ensures that entities managing Minnesota's natural resources can use our data to improve habitat protection.

Public outreach will turn project outcomes into accessible stories. On campus signage, regular keeper talks, and social media updates will serve as primary educational tools, providing updates on project milestones and the work supported by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. We will utilize digital media by sharing video updates of the rearing process and keeper logs. Earned media efforts will include press releases to local and regional news outlets to highlight project phases, such as the completion of a rearing cycle. Community events and citizen science workshops will teach visitors how to monitor wetlands and reduce chemical runoff to promote behavioral changes. All print and electronic media, publications, and signage will acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund through the required logo and attribution language.

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?

Following project completion, the established rearing facility and technical protocols will remain core assets of the Lake Superior Zoo. The project coordinator will integrate these efforts into our long-term conservation strategy, ensuring the partnership with the DNR for annual population augmentation continues.

While a permanent external funding source is not yet secured, the zoo will provide a portion of the ongoing operational costs. We are confident that initial results will allow us to identify further support from environmental foundations, state conservation funds, and private donors to fully sustain the program's growth and impact.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Lizzy Larson

Job Title: Director of Animal Management and Facilities

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

Lizzy Larson possesses a comprehensive blend of leadership and technical expertise that makes her qualified to lead Project LEAP. Her current role as Director of Animal Management and Facilities at the Lake Superior Zoo demonstrates her ability to provide high-level departmental leadership and oversee complex institutional processes. Larson holds a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science with coursework in genetics, animal breeding, and nutrition. In 2026, she completed the AZA Institutional Records Keeping Course. This ensures she can manage the rigorous documentation required for conservation projects. She also completed the AZA Creating Successful Exhibits Course in 2022 and currently assists with the conceptualization and construction supervision of animal exhibits. Her extensive experience in population management is vital for an amphibian preservation initiative. She actively develops and participates in

Species Survival Plans and supervises the breeding and transfer of managed populations. Since 2014, she has served as the Military Macaw Species Monitor for the Parrot TAG Steering Committee where she evaluates SSP program numbers and guides their progress. Furthermore, Larson has a long history at the Lake Superior Zoo in roles such as Training Coordinator and Primary Carnivore Keeper. This background proves her capability in developing husbandry protocols, managing veterinary care, and maintaining accreditation standards. Her ability to coordinate with architects and contractors ensures that the infrastructure for Project LEAP will meet necessary licensure and conservation benchmarks.

Organization: Arrowhead Zoological Society

Organization Description:

The Lake Superior Zoological Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that operates the Lake Superior Zoo in Duluth, Minnesota. Founded in 1923, the Zoo is the 19th oldest in the United States and one of only three institutions in Minnesota accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

The organization's mission is to provide close-up animal experiences that inspire connections with wildlife and action toward conservation in our region and around the world. Situated on 19 acres of rocky hillsides and pine forests along Kingsbury Creek, the Zoo serves as a vital regional hub for environmental education, wildlife rehabilitation, and conservation action.

We care for over 140 species and participate in global Species Survival Plans while championing local initiatives, such as stream monitoring and invasive species removal. Through immersive exhibits, a nature-based preschool, and year-round educational programming, the Society empowers the community to protect wildlife and wild places.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Director of Animal Care		Oversees all hatchery and animal care work			10%	0.3		\$10,000
Amphibian Senior Keeper (Hatchery Lead)		Oversees all care of amphibians			10%	3		\$120,000
Amphibian Care Staff		Day-to-day care of amphibians			10%	3		\$100,000
							Sub Total	\$230,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Ductless Mini-split HVAC	maintain temperature needed for rearing					\$9,500
	Tools and Supplies	Livestock Tubs	Raising Amphibians					\$2,000
	Tools and Supplies	Pumps	water filtration					\$500
	Tools and Supplies	PVC Pipe	water filtration					\$500
	Tools and Supplies	Sump Basin Tanks	water filtration					\$250
	Tools and Supplies	Filtration Materials	Water filtration					\$250
	Tools and Supplies	Chillers	Water Temperature Monitoring					\$2,800
	Tools and Supplies	Substrate	Flooring for animal rearing					\$1,000
	Tools and Supplies	Shipons	Water cleaning					\$500

	Tools and Supplies	Storage Bins	Equipment Storage					\$400
	Tools and Supplies	Racks	Tank Placement					\$5,500
	Tools and Supplies	Terrariums	raising amphibians					\$4,000
	Tools and Supplies	Lighting	light bulbs and heat bulbs					\$800
							Sub Total	\$28,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing for exhibit and work of project LEAP	Education					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$260,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	In House Zoo Support	The Zoo will in kind staff time to launch the project and provide administrative support to the work as well as care of the amphibians and exhibit space	Secured	\$45,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$45,000
			Funds Total	\$45,000

Total Project Cost: \$305,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [92cbc069-9cb.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

This is an image of the overall project proposal and work...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	7524eeef-e9b.pdf
990	ba233adb-fea.pdf
Audited Financials	c7c588d9-d39.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution	aa2965d5-09f.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?

No

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:

Noah Hobbs

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

N/A