



**Great
Lakes**
AQUARIUM



Lava to *Lakes*

Great Lakes Aquarium

Annual Report to the Governor and
the Minnesota State Legislature

Fiscal Year 2024

As per M.S. 129D.19 Subd. 5 and 3.303, Subd. 10

Project Name:

Lava to Lakes

Grantee Information:

Grantee: Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium

Contact: Jay Walker

Telephone number: (218) 740-2011

E-mail address: jwalker@glaquarium.org

Public access to the project:

[Lava to Lakes Webpage](#)

Project Description:

People have been drawn to the Great Lakes region since time immemorial for the vast opportunities the area provides. These diverse ecosystems were shaped by geologic history— thousands of lakes both big and small, prairies, bluffs, river valleys, hills, and mountains. In fact, the ancient stories of life on Earth itself are written in the landscape all around us.

Throughout Minnesota’s ancient history, there is evidence that modest changes to Earth’s systems have lasting and long-term impacts on life. These systems are dynamic and continuously react to subtle variations within the system. Some of those changes are related to weather patterns and the availability of water resources. These affect the homes and behaviors of both humans and animals alike.

The result of these cause-and-effect relationships created communities rooted in the resources of our landscape: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, raw materials, and recreation and tourism. Scientists use their understanding of the past to plan for Earth’s future. When the public understands the ancient patterns of our landscape, they are better equipped to address major issues such as climate change, resource management, and human safety.

Great Lakes Aquarium reveals the wonder of freshwater education and conservation through learning, play, and animal encounters for all ages. We engage and inspire more than 200,000 visitors with water and wildlife each year. Lava to Lakes explores these topics through immersive interactives, hands-on learning, and expanded touchpool opportunities. Our approach is to make them accessible through experience and play. Understanding Earth’s systems and how they interact with us today is vital to ensuring a healthy and vibrant Minnesota.

Throughout the 2,500-square-foot exhibit, guests will reach into the past to engage with animals and the waters of our region’s ancient seas. Exhibit elements will uncover the inextricable connection between land and life at the center of this tactile story. From the volatile beginning of Earth itself to the lakes in our backyards today, Lava to Lakes will reveal the impacts of incremental changes on the diversity of life. Opportunities to explore the connection between geologic history and human cultural history will be woven into the tactile experience. Strategically placed social cues pose questions to stimulate conversations and intergenerational learning.

Touchpools are a key interactive component of Lava to Lakes. Each touchpool exhibit will allow guests a close encounter with a species that represents a key moment of change for ancient life: from jellies to sea stars to sharks. Guests will be guided through the gallery in chronological order of events as they interact with exhibit components, observe new animals, and engage in conversations to deepen meaning and understanding of major geologic and life events.

Duration of the project:

09/01/2023 – 06/30/2025

Number of full-time equivalents funded under the project:

0.00 No staffing is funded through this grant.

Amount and source of funding, including the fiscal year of the appropriation:

FY 24: \$250,000 or \$240,000 after administrative fee

FY 25: \$250,000 or \$243,750 after administrative fee

Amount and source of any additional funding:

Funding Source	Fiscal Year 2024	Fiscal Year 2025
Lloyd K Johnson Foundation	\$20,000	
City of Duluth	\$120,424	\$195,792
Pachel Foundation		\$5,000
Overman Trust		\$2,000
Weesner Foundation		\$20,000
DSACF Morgan Fund		\$10,000
Private Donations		\$39,493
Total	\$140,424	\$272,285

Direct expenses and administration costs of the project:

Category	Total Budget	Fiscal Year 2024	Fiscal Year 2025
Staff (Design, Installation, Evaluation)	\$71,000	\$3,400	\$67,600
Gallery Prep and Habitats	\$500,000	\$198,146	\$301,854
Fabrication (Interactives and Models)	\$326,600	\$167,445	\$159,155
Interpretive Labels, Photography, Multi-Media	\$52,000	\$0	\$52,000
Marketing	\$7,000	\$0	\$7,000
TOTAL	\$956,600	\$368,991	\$587,609

Proposed measurable outcomes and plan for measuring and evaluating results:

Outcome	Status	Evaluation Strategy
Increase visitor dwell time and multi-point engagement with the natural history of Minnesota’s landscape.	Timing and tracking study completed of closed exhibit. Next study to be completed after new exhibit installation.	Timing and tracking study pre and post-exhibit installation.
Identify key geologic events in Minnesota's ancient history.	Evaluation not yet started.	Front end evaluation complete; summative evaluation after installation.
Ability to draw connections between the effects of environmental changes on living things.	Evaluation not yet started.	Front end evaluation complete; summative evaluation after installation.

Actual measured outcomes and evaluation required under 129D.17, subdivision 2:

Not yet started. The evaluation phase of the project will take place in FY 2025, May 15 – June 15, 2025.

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