

LEGACY FUNDS FY 2024



PROGRESS REPORT

# LAKE SUPERIOR ZOO

*Educational Exhibit*

**GRANT #241818 PO#300-13907**

ACCREDITED BY THE  
**ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS**



# Legacy Amendment Arts and Cultural Heritage Grant

Lake Superior Zoo | January 2025 | FY 2024 Annual Report| July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

## **Legislative Citation:**

*Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Session Laws, Chapter 40, Article 4, Section 2, Subd. 6, "\$150,000 each year is to develop educational exhibits and programs."*

## **Source:**

Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund

## **Duration:**

FY 24 - July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

## **Total Funding Amount:**

\$300,000

## **Administrative Costs:**

3% to MN Department of Administration Grant Management (\$2,250).

## **Direct Expenses:**

\$144,000.00



The Lake Superior Zoo is a statewide resource for every Minnesotan to experience close-up experiences with animals to inspire connections to wildlife and action towards conservation in our region and around the world. As one of the top-paid attractions in Duluth, both locals and tourists alike can learn about over 140 species of animals amongst a beautiful naturalistic setting with a DNR trout stream, Kingsbury Creek, running through the entire zoo grounds. We celebrated our centennial anniversary in 2023, and the LSZ will continue to highlight the importance of our legacy of education and conservation in Minnesota for years to come.

Though we are a paid attraction, LSZ staff and board members prioritize accessibility initiatives to ensure that all people, no matter their financial situation, are able to experience the wonders of wildlife and nature through programs such as Museums for All, Blue Star Museums, and Community Access Programs through our local libraries.

Funding from the Legacy Amendment's Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund has allowed us to bring to life new experiences for many years.

The Lake Superior Zoo grounds and buildings are owned by the City of Duluth and operated by the Lake Superior Zoological Society. We are one of three facilities in the state of Minnesota that are accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA). This educational exhibit featuring caribou is a wonderful complement to our accreditation as a conservation organization. Only 10% of zoos and aquariums in the United States hold this prestigious status, and Legacy funding has allowed us to bring to life many different exhibits and educational programs that support our accreditation.

Oversight of these projects is the responsibility of the Lake Superior and key senior staff.

Questions about these projects may be directed to:

Haley Hedstrom  
Executive Director

# LSZ INFORMATION & LEADERSHIP

**Mission:** To provide close-up animal experiences that inspire connections to wildlife and action towards conservation in our region and around the world.

**Vision:** A future where all living things thrive together.



## Community

We strive to be a place of gathering for our community and empower our neighbors in conservation



## Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion (DEAI)

We value and welcome all people and understand that diversity makes our organization stronger and more successful.



## Innovation

We take pride in our creativity and pledge to ensure ethical excellence in every function of our organization.



## Safety

We provide a safe space for all guests, staff, volunteers, and animals in our care.



## Stewardship

We compassionately act each day to protect wildlife, the environment, and all resources entrusted to us.

## DIRECTOR TEAM

- Haley Hedstrom, *Executive Director*
- Heidi Beal, *Director of Business Operations*
- Lizzy Larson, *Director of Animal Management & Facilities*
- Samantha Halligan, *Director of Guest Experience*
- Sarah Wilcox, *Director of Education & Preschool Director*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS FY2024

- Jim Lewis, *Board President*
- Dodie Brown, *Vice President*
- Kyle Dickinson, *Treasurer*
- Joey Engseth, *Secretary*
- Erica Walli
- Julie Benfield
- Jennifer Garland, DBA
- Noah Hobbs
- Bailey Olson
- Kathleen Privette
- Mike Polzin

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## *Bringing Caribou Back to Northern Minnesota*

Revitalizing the former white-tailed deer habitat into a dynamic, natural space for caribou is a transformative project designed to highlight the story of a species that has been historically native to Minnesota. Over the years, the existing exhibit had fallen into disrepair, with fencing deteriorating and trees encroaching on the space. The funding through the Arts & Cultural Heritage fund will help the Lake Superior Zoo restore and modernize the area by removing dead trees, constructing new shelters, and replacing fencing to meet current zoological standards. These efforts will create a safe and enriched environment for caribou while repurposing an underutilized space at the zoo.

The educational exhibit will highlight the historical and ecological significance of this species in Minnesota. Caribou once played a vital role in the region's ecosystem and were central to the culture of Indigenous peoples, particularly the Ojibwe in northern Minnesota. This exhibit provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the species' current conservation challenges. Beyond education, the project includes research initiatives focused on understanding why caribou disappeared from Minnesota and evaluating the potential for breeding and reintroduction programs in the state. These efforts underscore the project's commitment to both cultural storytelling and wildlife conservation.

To enhance visitor engagement, the exhibit will feature dynamic interpretive signage and interactive elements strategically placed throughout the habitat. These educational tools will provide insights into the caribou's natural history, ecological role, and cultural importance, ensuring an immersive and inclusive learning experience for all visitors. By combining static displays with interactive features, the exhibit will cater to diverse learning styles, fostering empathy for caribou and inspiring a deeper connection to Minnesota's natural heritage. This innovative approach aligns with the zoo's mission to promote environmental education and conservation, making the caribou exhibit a powerful platform for raising awareness and encouraging stewardship of the state's wildlife and ecosystems.

An exciting feature of the exhibit will be a guest overlook designed as a rustic-style cabin. This immersive viewing area will allow visitors to observe the caribou in a setting that reflects the animals' natural environment. The cabin will provide a unique perspective, encouraging guests to spend more time engaging with the exhibit while learning about species' role in Minnesota's history and ecosystem. The design of the overlook will include interpretive displays and seating areas, offering both a relaxing and educational experience. By creating this intimate connection with the animals, the cabin will enhance visitors' appreciation for caribou and inspire deeper empathy and understanding for wildlife conservation.

## FUNDING & EXPENSE OVERVIEW

Project Duration: July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024\*

FTEs: 0.28

Expense Categories: Contracted services, exhibit supplies, software licensing (for digital signage), advertising

Direct Expenses: \$144,000.00

Administrative Expense: 3% to MN Department of Grant Administration (\$4,320.00)

# MEASURABLE OUTCOMES & EVALUATION

The Caribou Yards project continues to progress as planned during FY24, with efforts focused on revitalizing the existing exhibit space to create a dynamic habitat for caribou. Currently, the space functions as a natural wildlife observation area, offering visitors opportunities to view local birds and small mammals while learning about pollination and the zoo's history through informational signage. As part of the project, baseline quantitative data collection is underway to measure how long visitors spend observing this habitat before the introduction of caribou. Once the project is complete, we will collect comparable data to evaluate the impact of the revitalized exhibit, aiming to increase visitor time spent at the habitat and overall engagement at the Lake Superior Zoo. However, as the project remains in progress during FY24, no data is available for reporting at this time.

The project's educational goals are integral to its success, with a focus on enriching public understanding of caribou and their significance to Minnesota's cultural and ecological history. Planned surveys will target outcomes such as 25% of zoo visitors reporting that they learned new information about caribou and their disappearance from the state. Additionally, we anticipate the exhibit will increase the average time visitors spend at the zoo by at least 20 minutes, reflecting the success of interpretive elements and the draw of the caribou themselves. While these outcomes are crucial measures of success, data collection related to these goals has not yet begun, as the exhibit is still under development.

In addition to quantitative goals, qualitative data collection will assess visitor knowledge, awareness, and empathy for caribou before and after the exhibit's completion. Pre-exhibit surveys are designed to establish baseline perceptions, which will be compared to post-exhibit responses to evaluate changes in visitor understanding and appreciation. Specific outcomes include increased awareness of conservation topics related to caribou and a deeper understanding of their importance from an Indigenous perspective. These qualitative insights will be invaluable in determining the effectiveness of the exhibit's educational components. While the project remains in progress during FY24 and no data is available at this time, these planned measures ensure that the Caribou Yards project will be well-positioned to achieve its intended impact.

 **Outcome data not yet available.**



