

**Great
Lakes**
AQUARIUM

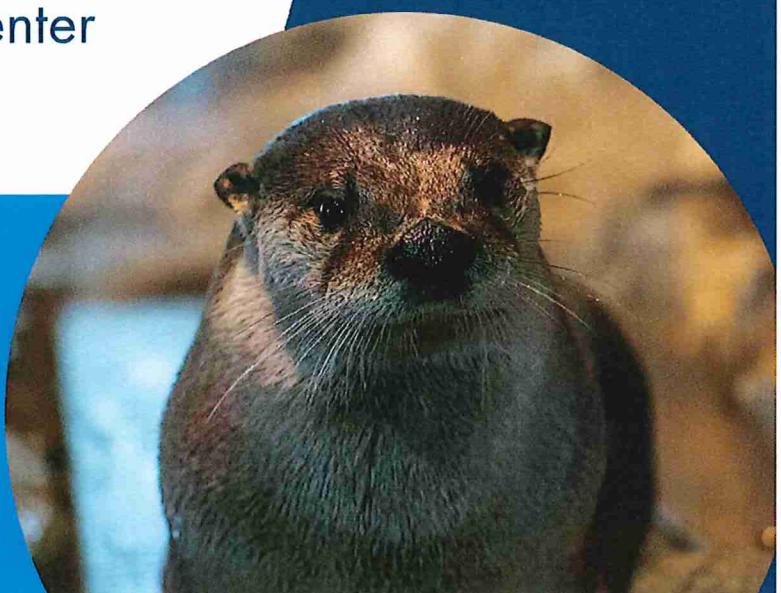
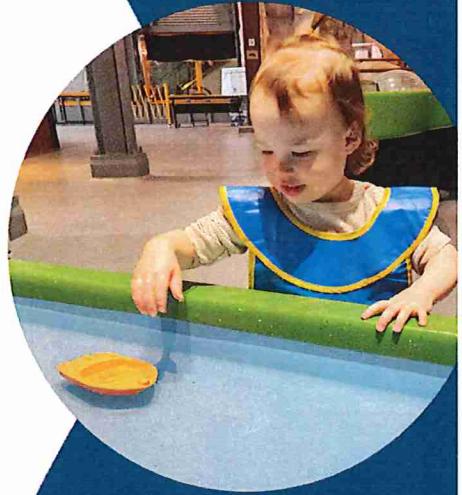
Lake Superior Center Authority 2025 Annual Report to the Legislature

Submitted January 2026

Pursuant to Minn. Stat. 85B.06;
1990 Minn. Laws Chap. 535 Sec. 6

Lake Superior Center Authority must submit an annual report to the legislature detailing the activities, funding and organizational operations for Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium.

**353 Harbor Drive
Duluth, MN 55802**



On behalf of Lake Superior Center Authority, we are pleased to present the 2025 Annual Report highlighting the accomplishments of Lake Superior Center, doing business as Great Lakes Aquarium. This year marked another milestone, with a record-breaking attendance of 237,500 visitors from January through December 2025 - the fifth consecutive year of record-setting attendance since opening in 2000.

Throughout the year, guests engaged in meaningful and personal interactions with a diverse range of animals, participated in educational programs, attended special events, and connected with family, friends, and the community in our dynamic learning space. These experiences reflect the Aquarium's ongoing commitment to fostering an engaging and enriching environment for all.

Great Lakes Aquarium currently employs 30 full-time and 45 part-time staff, with seasonal variations. Additional details on funding sources, assets, liabilities, and administrative expenses are included in Appendix A.

One of the year's highlights was the opening of the *Lava to Lakes* exhibit. This exhibit is supported by grants from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund and tells the dynamic story of Minnesota and Lake Superior's ancient history. This exhibit showcases significant geological events that have shaped the Great Lakes region and Minnesota's landscape, as well as the flora and fauna that have adapted to these changes.

In 2025, Lake Superior Center also received an Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund Legacy grant for a new project. Great Lakes Aquarium is partnering with MN Department of Natural resources, US Fish and Wildlife, and Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa to rear lake sturgeon to support the listed agencies' stocking efforts. This project will include a hatchery trailer and an exhibit component that tells the story of the lake sturgeons' return to the St. Louis River and the cultural significance to indigenous peoples. More information on these projects can be found in Appendix B.

Educational programming remained strong in 2025, with over 17,000 students actively participating in Aquarium-led experiences. Further details on these programs and initiatives are included in Appendix B.

Membership growth exceeded expectations, with a 12% increase over projections. Many of these memberships are family-based, reinforcing the Aquarium's role as a trusted and engaging learning space for families. The future holds exciting opportunities as we expand our exhibits, develop new partnerships, and secure additional resources to enhance the Aquarium's impact on the region and the State of Minnesota.

For additional information, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,



Jay Walker
Executive Director
Great Lakes Aquarium



Doug Britton
Chair
Lake Superior Center Authority



Appendix A - 2025 Financial Statements

Income Statement

	Jan - Dec 25
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
4000 · Admissions	2,445,105.08
4050 · Membership Income	316,268.00
4400 · Education Income	178,614.43
4200 · Donations	319,259.88
4300 · Retail Sales	1,028,069.15
4250 · Facility Rental \ Special Event	158,619.11
4600 · Parking Income	243,384.67
4500 · Miscellaneous	45,704.03
Total Income	4,735,024.35
Cost of Goods Sold	
6000 · Cost of Sales	474,200.89
6710 · Freight Charges, Product	38,807.73
Total COGS	513,008.62
Gross Profit	4,222,015.73
Expense	
5100 · Admin. - Expenses	177,683.59
5101 · Admin Payroll	372,834.44
5200 · Education - Expenses	37,407.36
5201 · Education - Payroll	592,867.44
5300 · Husbandry - Expenses	226,977.05
5301 · Husbandry - Payroll	844,315.36
5400 · Operations -Facility- Expenses	681,399.62
5401 · Operations -Facility-Payroll	390,230.78
5700 · Operations-General Expense	268,818.93
5701 · Operations-Guest ServicePayroll	435,284.03
5500 · Facility Rental / Special Event	23,554.14
5600 · Store - Expenses	25,937.50
5601 · Store - Payroll	51,674.05
Total Expense	4,128,984.29
Net Ordinary Income	93,031.44
Other Income/Expense	
Other Income	
7305 · Minnesota Power Rebate Income	18,368.64
7000 · Purchase Discounts	1,688.40
7100 · Tourism Tax Operational Support	310,000.00
Total Other Income	330,057.04
Other Expense	
9043 · Sturgeon Conservation Project	62,524.72
9045 · Oceans Alive	9,998.03
9041 · Second Floor Remodel (Origins)	215,854.49
Total Other Expense	288,377.24
Net Other Income	41,679.80
Net Income	<u>134,711.24</u>

Appendix A - 2025 Financial Statements

Balance Sheet

	Dec 31, 25
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
1000 · Cash and Cash Equivalents	<u>718,417.93</u>
Total Checking/Savings	<u>718,417.93</u>
Accounts Receivable	
1150 · Accounts Receivable	<u>27,904.70</u>
Total Accounts Receivable	<u>27,904.70</u>
Other Current Assets	
1300 · Other Current Assets	186,921.77
1380 · Undeposited Funds	<u>7,010.88</u>
Total Other Current Assets	<u>193,932.65</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>940,255.28</u>
Fixed Assets	
1200 · Fixed Assets	4,374,120.16
1250 · Accumulated Depreciation	<u>-2,804,945.18</u>
Total Fixed Assets	<u>1,569,174.98</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>2,509,430.26</u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	
2007 · Accounts Payable, General	<u>89,006.99</u>
Total Accounts Payable	<u>89,006.99</u>
Credit Cards	
2700 · Employee Credit Cards	<u>22,661.90</u>
Total Credit Cards	<u>22,661.90</u>
Other Current Liabilities	
2530 · Capital Lease Payable-Current	3,160.77
2500 · Other Current Liabilities	<u>268,321.09</u>
2900 · Deferred Revenue	<u>180,911.05</u>
Total Other Current Liabilities	<u>452,392.91</u>
Total Current Liabilities	<u>564,061.80</u>
Long Term Liabilities	
2300 · Long Term Liabilities	447,770.20
2301 · Capital Lease Payable	<u>5,205.67</u>
Total Long Term Liabilities	<u>452,975.87</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>1,017,037.67</u>
Equity	
3001 · Fund Balance	-635,517.45
3200 · Unrestricted Net Assets	<u>1,993,198.80</u>
Net Income	<u>134,711.24</u>
Total Equity	<u>1,492,392.59</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u>2,509,430.26</u>

By the Numbers

- 200 teaching kits lent out to regional educators, free of charge
- 210 campers participated in summer camp programs
- 1,350 hours of early childhood education
- 5,900 volunteer hours served
- 13,500 animal encounters
- 17,000 pre-k - 12th grade students participated in on-site programming



Appendix B - 2025 Accomplishments

The following list showcases some of the efforts and successes at Great Lakes Aquarium this past year.

1) Community Learning and Visitor Engagement

Great Lakes Aquarium provides on- and off-site educational programming to learners of all ages. Daily interpretive programs give guests the opportunity to learn more about resident animals while watching them eat, play, or interact with staff. Classes and formal programming are provided to youth, while teacher workshops and visiting speakers provide enriching experiences for adults. Outreach programs bring the wonder of Great Lakes Aquarium out into the community, especially for those whom a visit to the Aquarium is not feasible.

2025 Accomplishments:

- Dr. Shawna Weaver was hired in February as Director of Learning and Engagement replacing Alexis Berke who left for new opportunities.
- Teacher Resource kits received a much-needed update. These kits are a free resource to educators and include lesson plans and props about various STEM topics related to the Lake Superior watershed. The Aquarium has 68 unique kits available for teachers.
- Pollinator plants were added to the outdoor playscape, teaching nature-play students the importance of successful fauna growth.
- Free summer programming was added, increasing accessibility for middle school students.
- An additional session was added for early childhood students, expanding learning opportunities for explorers aged three-10.



2) Exhibits, Husbandry, and Facilities

Great Lakes Aquarium features individual animals from more than 400 unique species found within the Great Lakes Basin, other freshwater ecosystems, and saltwater habitats alike. This broad representation of biodiversity allows visitors of all ages to experience the majesty of nature across the world, as well as in their own backyards, sometimes quite literally, as seen in exhibits such as *Wild Neighbors*.

2025 Accomplishments:

- The Aquarium's living collection includes approximately 2,000 aquatic and terrestrial animals.
- In June, Great Lakes Aquarium opened *Lava to Lakes*, a 2,500-square-foot exhibit focused on the ancient geological history of the Great Lakes. The gallery features interpretive geological narratives presented through rock formations, and immersive animal experiences such as shark and jellyfish touchpools. The majority of the exhibit's infrastructure was designed and constructed in-house by facilities and animal care staff.
- The exhibits team initiated planning efforts for the reintroduction of lake sturgeon to the St. Louis River. This work included completion of preliminary design drawings and procurement of key life-support system components.
- New animals were acquired to support the *Lava to Lakes* exhibit, including Pacific sea nettles, blue blubber jellyfish, multiple species of sharks, skates, horseshoe crabs, ratfish, and giant isopods.
- Great Lakes Aquarium assisted with the rehoming of animals following the closure of SeaQuest in Robbinsdale, MN. Aided animals included 20 trout, one electric eel, and two white sturgeon.

3) Marketing and Communications

Great Lakes Aquarium is committed to increasing wonder by introducing guests to new animals and experiences, re-engaging with individuals and the funding community, planning for long-term future success, and maintaining a brand that supports its mission and is easily identifiable to the public.

2025 Accomplishments:

- Throughout 2025, Great Lakes Aquarium's social media presence saw significant growth, particularly on Instagram, where strategic content and viral reels contributed to a notable increase in followers. Facebook increased from 18,779 to 25,922 page "likes" and Instagram grew from 19,388 to 39,184 followers (+98%).
- Continuing the collaborative program with the North Shore Scenic Railroad and William A. Irvin, the Duluth Passport allowed tourists and locals to visit all three attractions with a single ticket purchase.
- Great Lakes Aquarium continued to receive strong media coverage across local and regional outlets with the opening of *Lava to Lakes* and 25th anniversary celebrations.
- A video commercial for *Lava to Lakes* ran on various television and online platforms, increasing awareness of the Aquarium's new exhibit in the Twin Cities and Twin Ports markets leading to increased ticket sales in targeted areas.



4) Development and Community Engagement

At the Aquarium, we are committed to fostering strong community relationships by creating meaningful opportunities for visitors, employees, volunteers, donors, and other stakeholders to connect with our mission. By building partnerships with local organizations, schools, businesses, and philanthropic supporters, we create enriching experiences that bring people together while deepening their understanding of the Great Lakes region. Our dedicated efforts strengthen involvement through events, outreach programs, and donor initiatives that build lasting relationships, remove barriers to access, and cultivate the financial support necessary to sustain our work. Through these integrated strategies, we ensure that the Aquarium remains a valued, accessible, and resilient resource for the entire community.



2025 Development Accomplishments:

- Courtney Lepak was promoted to Assistant Director of Development and Community Outreach, a role designed to advance the Aquarium's fundraising strategies and deepen community engagement.

Grants

- \$4,000 DNR Capacity Grant to support transportation for visiting schools
- \$5,000 from Boreal Waters Community Foundation Fund for Women and Girls to support the Women in Science series and increase accessibility for future female leaders in STEM-focused camps and classes
- \$10,000 DNR STAR Grant to support teenage participants in the Waves and Junior Waves programs
- \$50,000 from Boreal Waters Community Foundation Biodiversity Fund to help facilitate the sturgeon restoration project
- \$400,000 from LCCMR Arts and Cultural Heritage fund for FY 25/26 to develop the lake sturgeon restoration project. This funding will be used to develop infrastructure needed for water filtration and an expanded physical footprint dedicated to the exhibit.





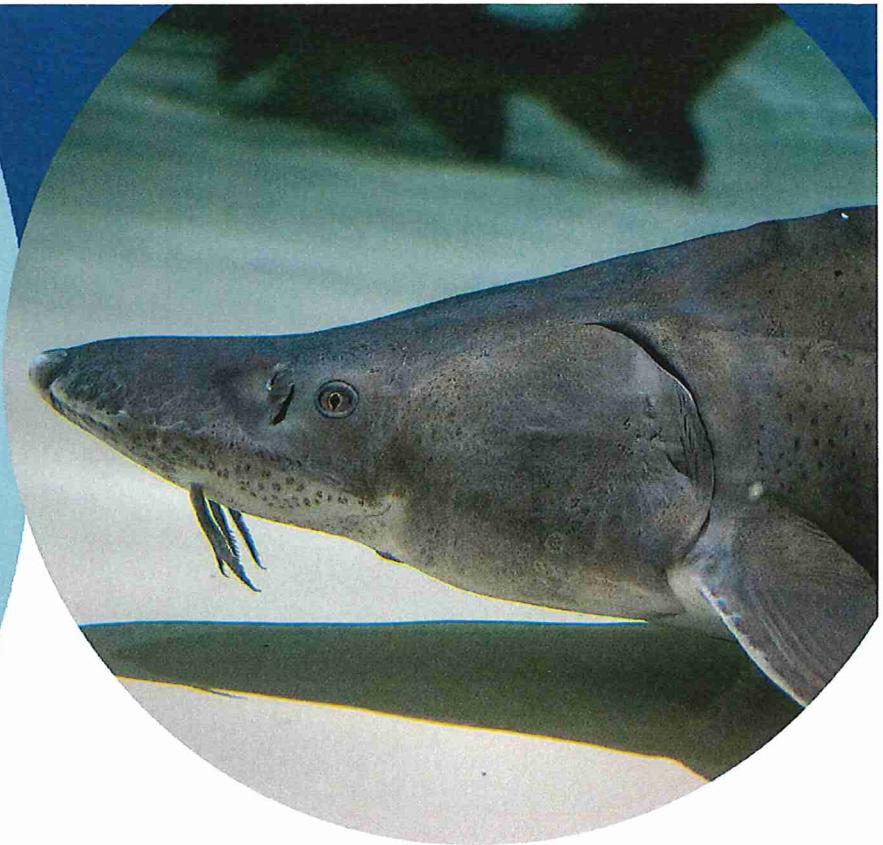
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

DULUTH
MINNESOTA

2000-2025



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2025 Community Engagement Accomplishments:

- The Aquarium participated in 21 outreach events in 2025 and introduced several new community-focused programs hosted within its facility.
- In March, the inaugural Women in Science event highlighted local ecologists and explored diverse relationships with water in the Great Lakes region.
- In April, the Aquarium partnered with the Duluth Library Foundation to launch National Library Week with a two-hour community celebration that welcomed more than 500 guests.
- 2025 also saw a new partnership with Café Scientifique, the local chapter of a national initiative dedicated to making complex scientific topics accessible and engaging to the public.

25th Anniversary Celebration

In July, Great Lakes Aquarium marked its 25th Anniversary with a week-long series of events that highlighted its history, community partnerships, and ongoing commitment to conservation and education.

25th Anniversary activities included the opening of a time capsule originally buried in 2000 at the dedication of the Aquarium. The time capsule will be refilled in early 2026 to be opened again in 2050 at the Aquarium's 50th Anniversary!

Other activities included discounted admission, a sustainability and conservation fair featuring exhibits from local community partners and themed educational activities, a beer garden, and an open-house style celebration.

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

CORE VALUES | WE ARE...

Engaging. We recognize the essential role of being accessible and connecting with Aquarium visitors from all backgrounds. The passion of our staff shines through our work and brings people back to experience the Aquarium time and again.

Sustainable. We are careful stewards of the Aquarium's resources, including both those we need to continue and grow our operations and the natural world around us. We recognize the Aquarium's interconnectedness with our waters and wildlife and seek to model ethical practices in all our work.

Inclusive. We seek to create an environment where everyone who engages with the Aquarium feels welcome and respected. We pursue proactive efforts to increase our reach, particularly with those who have not historically experienced everything the Aquarium has to offer.

Educational. We strive to give all who engage with the Aquarium opportunities to gain new insights into the world around them. We collaborate across boundaries to explore our environments and share messages that embody our mission and vision.

