

			Project Requests for State Funds			Gov's Rec	Gov's Planning Estimates	
Project Title	Rank	Fund	2026	2028	2030	2026	2028	2030
Asset Preservation	1	GO	30,000	15,000	15,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
Total Project Requests			30,000	15,000	15,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
General Obligation Bonds (GO) Total			30,000	15,000	15,000	4,000	4,000	4,000

<http://www.mnzoo.org/>

### AT A GLANCE

- A world-class conservation organization that is home to nearly 5,000 animals —many endangered
- 485-acre campus with 125 buildings and related facilities
- Nearly 1.35 million guests in FY25
- The state’s largest environmental educator, serving over 172,000 participants in FY25
- More than 109,000 free admissions to Minnesotans who qualify for public assistance programs through the “Free to Explore” admission program in FY25

### PURPOSE

The mission of the Minnesota Zoological Garden (Minnesota Zoo or Zoo) is ***to connect people, animals, and the natural world to save wildlife.***

The Minnesota Zoo is an expansive environmental marvel with a campus including 125 buildings, 6.5 miles of roads, and 4.75 miles of pathways within nearly 500 acres of picturesque woodland and aquatic landscapes. Housing nearly 5,000 animals—including many threatened and endangered species from around the world—the Zoo is the state’s largest environmental learning center and a leader in wildlife conservation.

The Zoo provides engaging and hands-on learning and play opportunities for children to experience Minnesota’s native environment through amenities like the Hanifl Family Wild Woods and Woodland Adventure. Zoo guests can also learn about the natural world around the globe while visiting cutting-edge exhibits such as Discovery Bay, 3M Penguins of the African Coast, Medtronic Minnesota Trail, Tropics Trail, Northern Trail, Wells Fargo Family Farm, and Russia’s Grizzly Coast. Opened in 2023, the 1.25-mile Treetop Trail brings guests up to 32 feet above the ground and provides a year-round, accessible journey into nature for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. These experiences are designed to be intentional about building a bridge for collectively appreciating the treasures that Minnesota’s natural environment has to offer, as well as building awareness of global conservation issues.

The Zoo is ardently committed and actively engaged in saving wildlife and protecting the ecosystems upon which they rely in Minnesota and around the world. Minnesota Zoo experts use science, in partnership with other state and federal agencies, to focus on the reintroduction of the state’s most imperiled butterflies and the restoration of the prairieland they need to survive. Additional current conservation initiatives focus on threatened aquatic turtles, restoring native endangered freshwater mussels, and reintroducing wild bison herds onto Minnesota lands. Its international conservation efforts through the renowned black rhino project, reintroduction of Asian wild horses, and championing tiger conservation for decades led to the Minnesota Zoo’s recognition as a catalyst for wildlife conservation.

As a leading environmental education institution, the Minnesota Zoo has long offered a wide variety of expertly created educational and interpretive programming designed to build understanding and respect for nature and empower students to become change agents for protecting wildlife and wild places. In FY25, 104,562 students enjoyed educational programming offered through in-person and virtual community programs, school/youth group field trips, and classes. Also, over 3,494 in-person and virtual Summer Zoo Camp participants received age-appropriate professional education, animal encounters, special zoo experiences, active games, and tours in FY25.

Leveraging its proven environmental education model, the Minnesota Zoo continues to reimagine and offer new educational opportunities. The Zoo’s “Show Us Your Mussels” campaign inspires middle and high school students to create original digital media campaigns to educate the public about the importance of native mussels, their

impact to water quality, and what actions are needed to ensure their survival. This summer, the Minnesota Zoo's licensed Nature Preschool was awarded a 4-star Parent Aware Rating – the highest possible rating. Parent Aware is Minnesota's voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement system for preschools as directed under Section 142D.13 Minnesota Statutes. The Nature Preschool is fully booked for the 2025-2026 school year.

The Minnesota Zoo continues to prioritize access and inclusion initiatives so that a zoo experience is never limited due to economic, cultural, physical, geographic, or other barriers. The "Zoo Explorers Fund" provides financial assistance to under-served schools throughout the state so that all students can experience the awe of a close encounter with a wild animal. Also, in FY25, 109,389 guests accessed the Zoo through the "Free to Explore" program, which ensures Zoo admission is free for Minnesotans who qualify for public assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, MinnesotaCare, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Furthermore, the Zoo offers a variety of programs which serve communities with special and differing needs. Recent examples include American Sign Language (ASL) days at the Zoo to support individuals learning ASL as a second or multiple language, Dream Night for children with chronic healthcare needs, early access to special events for those requiring a less crowded and stimulating environment, and autism camps. The Zoo bridges additional access barriers by providing ASL interpreters, sighted guides, and tactile and virtual tours.

## **STRATEGIES**

The Minnesota Zoo's new board-approved Strategic Plan and Long-Range Facilities Plan guide the Zoo into its next 50 years with a bold nature-forward vision. Together, these plans ensure that the Zoo advances animal wellbeing, conservation, education, and guest experience while addressing critical infrastructure needs.

The following pillars guide the Zoo's operations and capital investments:

- **Advance Animal Collection and Save Wildlife:** Ensure the Minnesota Zoo's Animal Care, Health, Conservation and Behavior model remains exemplary and is leading the industry as an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.
- **Champion People and Culture:** Ensure the Minnesota Zoo is a desirable place to work and that the Zoo's expert team reflects Minnesota's diverse communities and is living its mission and values.
- **Create a Nature Centered Guest Experience:** Create the nation's leading nature zoo experience that is guest-centric, robust, accessible and welcoming to all.
- **Build Animal and Nature-forward Long-Range Plan:** Modernize facilities, create new guest experiences, address deferred maintenance, and invest in future-facing infrastructure.
- **Drive Revenue Generation for Growth:** Maximize diverse revenue portfolio, optimize ROI, and increase business intelligence/acumen.

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The Zoo's capital priorities are determined against these strategic goals. The priority projects are designed to:

- Address critical infrastructure and deferred maintenance on a nearly 50-year-old campus.
- Reimagine guest experiences to inspire new generations of wildlife champions. Advance modern standards for animal care and welfare.
- Ensure long-term financial and operational sustainability through mission-aligned revenue generation

The Zoo's capital plan leverages private funding sources whenever possible, in line with the Zoo's business model of being a public/private partnership.

### Factors Impacting Facilities or Capital Programs

Major factors impacting the Minnesota Zoo's facility and capital projects are:

- **An aging facility.** The Zoo's facilities, now nearly 50 years old, face over \$78 million in asset preservation needs, with 30% of buildings in poor or crisis condition. Deferred maintenance directly impacts safety, guest experience, and revenue.
- **Guest expectations.** Over half of the Zoo's operating revenue comes from earned income sources such as admissions, membership, and education programs. To maintain and grow these revenues, the Zoo must meet increasing guest expectations for exhibit quality, new technology, guest amenities, and animal care. Our guests expect to have extraordinary, new experiences when they visit the Zoo. The Zoo's priority capital projects are chosen with these guest expectations in mind.
- **Animal care and welfare standards.** Accreditation requires that animal facilities meet the latest welfare standards. Priority capital projects such as the remodeling of our current animal hospital are designed to bring the Zoo facility up to current standards.

## **Self-Assessment of Agency Facilities and Assets**

The most recent Facilities Conditions Assessment (FCA) of the Zoo site, identified over \$78 million in deferred maintenance throughout the site. Over half of the square footage managed by the Zoo is rated in crisis or poor conditions. This assessment is used in setting priorities for large capital and maintenance projects.

## **Agency Process for Determining Capital Requests**

Capital requests are developed through the Zoo's board-approved Strategic Plan and Long-Range Facilities Plan. These documents informed by staff, community, and stakeholder engagement, provide a 10-year framework for project prioritization. The Zoo balances urgent asset preservation with transformative projects that advance the Zoo's mission and strategic plan.

## **Major Capital Projects Authorized in 2024 and 2025**

In 2025, The Zoo was appropriated \$13.74 million for major capital projects, including:

- \$11 million to construct a new animal hospital to replace the Zoo's 48-year-old obsolete animal hospital.
- \$2.74 million for asset preservation projects to address deferred maintenance around the Zoo.

## Asset Preservation

**AT A GLANCE****2026 Request Amount:** \$30,000**Priority Ranking:** 1

**Project Summary:** Urgently needed asset preservation to address human safety, animal welfare, and critical infrastructure projects throughout the Minnesota Zoo's nearly 50-year-old, 485-acre campus. Nearly a third of the Zoo's structures and over half of total square footage is rated in crisis or poor condition. Significant investment is needed to mitigate major risks that, if not addressed, will endanger the public, Zoo staff and partners, and the animals in the Zoo's care.

**Project Description**

The Minnesota Zoo is nearly 50 years old, and the campus is aging rapidly. Asset preservation is urgently needed to address human safety, animal welfare, and critical infrastructure projects throughout the campus that serves 1.4 million people annually and is home to nearly 5,000 animals--including many endangered species.

The Zoo operates on the scale of a small city, with 485 acres of land, 123 structures, 6.5 miles of roads, 4.75 miles of pathways, 48 acres of parking lots, and 25 miles of fencing. Like a city, the Zoo maintains and operates its own underground utilities such as sewer, water supply, and stormwater systems, as well as its own heat plant and backup generators. Above ground, animal exhibits and holding facilities require complex air handling and life support systems to ensure animal welfare.

Priorities for asset preservation include:

- Replace the 50-year-old high-temperature, high-pressure heating system with a modern, reliable, and sustainable low-pressure system. This project is urgent because the existing boilers are beyond industry-recommended end-of-life and one recently required an emergency overhaul that cost nearly \$1 million. This system is vital to provide safe temperature conditions for sensitive animal species and for the comfort of guests, staff, contractors, and volunteers. (\$15 million)
- Replace aging civil utility infrastructure including underground water, sewer, and electrical systems throughout the site. These systems are well beyond their expected life, and are experiencing frequent, costly failures that damage property and put people and animals at risk. In the last several years, the Zoo has experienced three bursts in the water main that serves the Tropics Building, one of which caused a sink hole in a pathway near the black bear exhibit. Catastrophic failure of these utilities would be detrimental to Zoo operations and may even force a complete closure of the Zoo. (\$1.75 million)
- Replace the fences surrounding two large tiger habitats to ensure continued containment of dangerous carnivores to protect guests, staff, volunteers, and the public. A Zoo staff person was

recently injured due in part to aging fences. Functional primary and secondary containment fences are required to maintain USDA licensure to exhibit wild animals; without this licensure the Zoo would be forced to close. (\$6 million)

- Replace aging and failing life support systems serving aquariums and water features in the Minnesota Trail, Discovery Bay, and Tropics Trail areas of the Zoo. These systems are critical to sustaining aquatic animal health and maintaining water quality standards. Proactive replacement will reduce risk of catastrophic system failure that could jeopardize animal welfare including loss of animals, disruption to the guest experience, and potentially force exhibit closures. (\$2 million)
- Replace deteriorated decking and safety railing systems on the bridge over the camel exhibit. These systems are beyond their useful life and will soon be unable to sufficiently protect the public from dangerous falls. (\$750 thousand)
- Replace failing roofs throughout the Zoo. Currently nearly one fifth of Zoo structures have roofs rated in crisis or poor condition. The first phase of this project would replace about a third of the roofs in crisis or poor condition. (\$1 million)
- Extend the useful life of animal exhibits through substantial renovation to meet modern animal welfare standards, address animal and staff safety issues, and improve the viewing experience for guests which is the intended purpose of the exhibits. Known problems exist in a wide range of areas affecting puma, otter, bald eagle, great horned owl, flamingos, pigs, wolves, camels, and various ambassador animals. (\$1.5 million)
- Replace the failing waste compactor and improve waste management practices at the onsite composting area to ensure proper containment and handling of wastes. The current equipment and infrastructure are beyond their useful life, do not meet operational needs, and pose risks of spillage, contamination, and failure to meet regulatory requirements. (\$350 thousand)
- Repair or replace building structure and cladding systems that are beyond their service life to properly protect from further damage at two of the Zoo's oldest structures: A and B Buildings. (\$1.5 million)
- The second phase of a multi-year project to replace the obsolete monitoring and control system for HVAC and life support systems that is longer supported by the manufacturer. A modern monitoring and control system is vital to ensuring Zoo staff can take action to prevent sudden temperature changes and other hazardous conditions from endangering the lives of animals or causing discomfort for guests, staff, volunteers, and contractors. (\$150 thousand)

## Project Rationale

Asset preservation appropriations are vital to maintaining this important state asset for future generations of Zoo guests. According to the recent Facility Condition Assessment Report issued by the Minnesota Department of Administration (2025):

- Zoo facilities rated the **third worst in deferred maintenance** as a percentage of replacement value among all state agencies managing more than 500,000 sq. feet of building space.
- The Zoo's **deferred maintenance exceeds \$78 million** for just its buildings, which is nearly thirty percent of the state's calculated replacement value for all Zoo buildings. Deferred maintenance of the Zoo's extensive exhibits, pathways, and other infrastructure adds millions to these totals.
- **Nearly one-third** of the Zoo's structures—encompassing more than half the Zoo's square

footage—are rated in **crisis or poor condition**

Rising deferred maintenance is driving up the Zoo's operating costs through inefficient systems and costly emergency repairs which ultimately requires more staff to manage. The Zoo experiences a high and growing number of injuries to staff, partly due to deferred maintenance and aging facilities that do not reflect modern safety standards. Significant asset preservation appropriations are necessary to mitigate major risks that if not addressed will endanger the public, Zoo staff and partners, and the animals in our care.

### **Project Timeline**

Asset preservation funding will be spent during the four-year timeframe of the appropriation.

### **Other Considerations**

#### **Impact on Agency Operating Budgets**

Asset preservation projects support a sustainable business model for the Minnesota Zoo. More efficient building systems reduce utility and repair bills. Timely infrastructure improvements prevent costly failures and downtime, which are straining Zoo budgets and operations. Renovating and retrofitting existing spaces makes staff more efficient and improves the guest experience – both of which are vital to generating revenue and controlling costs. The majority the Zoo's operating budget is earned through admissions, membership, education, and contributions. Supporting a positive guest experience through maintaining the Zoo's campus is essential to the Zoo's continued operation.

#### **Description of Previous Appropriations**

2025 - \$2.74 million

2023 - \$16.8 million total of which \$15.12 million is for lakeside plaza replacement

2020 - \$13 million total of which \$11 million is for Treetop Trail

2018 - \$6 million

2017 - \$4 million

2014 - \$7 million

### **Project Contact Person**

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### **Governor's Recommendation**

The Governor recommends \$4 million in general obligation bonds for this request. Also included are budget estimates of \$4 million for each planning period for 2028 and 2030.



(\$ in thousands)

## Asset Preservation

## PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES

Funding Source	Six Prior Years	FY 2026	FY 2028	FY 2030
<b>State Funds Appropriated and Requested</b>				
General Obligation Bonds	\$ 32,540	\$ 30,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
<b>State Funds Pending</b>				
<b>Non-State Funds Already Committed</b>				
<b>Non-State Funds Pending</b>				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 32,540</b>	<b>\$ 30,000</b>	<b>\$ 15,000</b>	<b>\$ 15,000</b>

## TOTAL PROJECT COSTS

Cost Category	Six Prior Years	FY 2026	FY 2028	FY 2030
Property Acquisition	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Predesign Fees	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Design Fees	\$ 0	\$ 4,200	\$ 2,100	\$ 2,100
Project Management	\$ 0	\$ 300	\$ 150	\$ 150
Construction	\$ 32,540	\$ 25,500	\$ 12,750	\$ 12,750
Relocation Expenses	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
One Percent for Art	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Occupancy Costs	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Inflationary Adjustment	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 32,540</b>	<b>\$ 30,000</b>	<b>\$ 15,000</b>	<b>\$ 15,000</b>

## IMPACT ON STATE OPERATING COSTS

Cost Category	FY 2026	FY 2028	FY 2030
IT Costs	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Operating Budget Impact (\$)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Operating Budget Impact (FTE)	0	0	0

## SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR DEBT SERVICE PAYMENTS

	Amount	Percent of Total
General Fund	\$ 30,000	100 %
User Financing	\$ 0	0 %

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

The following requirements will apply to projects after adoption of the bonding bill.

Has the project owner requesting state funds reviewed and agree to meet the applicable capital requirements listed in the “Statutory Requirements” below and in the “Capital Budget Requirements” section of the MMB Capital Budget Instruction documents?	
Is this project exempt from legislative review under M.S. 16B.335 subd. 1a?	Yes
<b>Predesign Review (M.S. 16B.335 subd. 3):</b>	
Does this request include funding for predesign?	N/A
Has the predesign been submitted to the Department of Administration?	N/A
Has the predesign been approved by the Department of Administration?	N/A
<b>Will the project design meet the Sustainable Building Guidelines under M.S. 16B.325?</b>	N/A
<b>Will the project designs meet applicable requirements and guidelines for energy conservation and alternative energy sources (M.S. 16B.335 subd. 4 and 16B.32)?</b>	N/A
<b>Have Information Technology Review Preconditions been met (M.S. 16B.335 subd. 5 &amp; 6)?</b>	N/A
<b>Will the project comply with the targeted group purchasing requirement (M.S. 16C.16 subd. 13)?</b>	Yes
<b>Will the project meet public ownership requirements (M.S. 16A.695)?</b>	Yes
<b>Will a use agreement be required (M.S. 16A.695 subd. 2)?</b>	No
<b>Will program funding be reviewed and ensured (M.S. 16A.695 subd. 5)?</b>	N/A
<b>Will the matching funds requirements be met (M.S. 16A.86 subd. 4)?</b>	N/A
<b>Will the project be fully encumbered prior to the Cancellation Deadline (M.S. 16A.642): December 31, 2030?</b>	Yes
<b>M.S. 16A.502 and M.S. 16B.31 (2): Full Funding Required</b>	Yes
<b>M.S. 473.4485: Guideway Project</b>	
Is this a Guideway Project?	N/A
Is the required information included in this request?	N/A