



The Art of Conservation Presents The 2025-26 Fish Art Contest

Rules & Guidelines

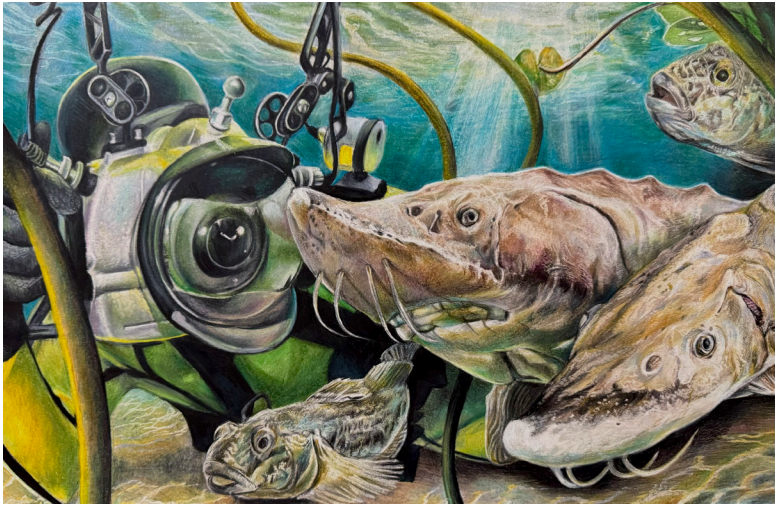


Eligibility:

- The Fish Art Contest is free to enter and **open to all students in grades K-12**.
- Students may submit one 2D entry (e.g., drawings, paintings, collages) and one 3D entry (e.g., sculptures, wood carvings, plastic portraits). Separate entry forms are available for 2D and 3D submissions, which will be judged and awarded separately. Previous entries are not eligible.
- Each entry must **include both an original artwork and a creative writing piece** (writing is optional for students in grades K-3).
- **All entries must be submitted through an online entry form**, even if you mail in the physical artwork and essay. For 3D entries, only submit photos online; do not mail physical 3D artwork to prevent damage.
- Group entry forms are available for educators submitting on behalf of 2+ students.
- **Some U.S. states have their own Fish Art Contest.** If your state has a hosted contest, you must submit through your state's entry form. State contests may have additional eligibility rules, such as specific fish species, artwork size/orientation, and/or mailing requirements for submissions. Please refer to the online entry forms for complete and up-to-date details specific to your state.
- **3D entries are not part of state contests and must be submitted via the general 3D entry form only.**
- If mailing in 2D artwork, it must be no larger than 11"x17" and 2" thick. Some states have different size restrictions - check your state's rules before mailing.
- Entries must follow all contest guidelines and be **submitted by February 28th, 2026**.

Artwork Specifications:

- **Artwork must feature a fish or shark species in a natural habitat.** Some state contests limit eligible species - check the entry form for eligible fish in your state.
- **Goldfish, guppies, bettas, and koi fish are NOT eligible for all contests.**
- Depending on the species being drawn in the artwork, you **may be eligible for specialty awards. You can be eligible for multiple awards.** For example, by submitting artwork depicting both native and invasive species, you would be eligible for state recognition, national recognition, and the Invader Crusader specialty award. Visit the [Specialty Awards webpage](#) to learn more.



Example: Jamila Shin's artwork featured a native species (Lake sturgeon) and a invasive species (Round goby) of the Great Lakes. They won 1st place in New Jersey in their age category, the Art of Conservation Award, and the Invader Crusader in the 2025 Fish Art Contest.

- **Artwork must be the student's own, original, hand-done creation.** Copying or closely replicating another's work (including photos or artworks) is not allowed and will result in disqualification.
- **Not allowed:** Digital art, AI-generated content, or computer-edited pieces.
- **Accepted 2D mediums include:** colored pencil, crayon, paint, marker, pastel, chalk, and collage. Spray fixative is recommended for pastel or chalk to prevent smudging.
- **Accepted 3D mediums include:** clay sculptures, wood carvings, and plastic portraits.



Example of 3D artwork: Dongwoo Jung's Red Lion fish sculpture made from plastic debris from an ocean cleanup. He was the winner of the 2025 IGFA Debris Division Award.

- Artwork must be free of any writing, names, or signatures on the front. Signatures may be written on the back only.
- **Plagiarism Warning:** Any artwork that appears to substantially replicate existing artwork or photography will be disqualified. For example, using the same medium, pose, lighting, and composition as another artist's image is considered plagiarism, even if redrawn by hand.

Plagiarism Example



Original artwork drawn by gannonned
Source: <https://gannonned.wordpress.com/2015/02/24/musky-recent-commission/>



Replicated artwork submitted to the Fish Art Contest

This is an example that shows a case of plagiarism. Even though the student drew it by hand, they copied another artist's work nearly exactly—same medium, pose, lighting, and background. This level of replication is not allowed in the Fish or Songbird Art Contests. Even if you draw something yourself, copying another artwork or photograph too closely—especially in composition and execution—is considered plagiarism. Your artwork must be an original creation that reflects your interpretation and creativity.

Regardless of how skillful a piece may be, **if it is found to be plagiarized, it will be disqualified from all awards.** Final decisions on plagiarism are made by Wildlife Forever and State Hosts.

Best Practices When Using References

Using photo references is encouraged—but **your final piece must be recognizably your own.**

- It is acceptable to use the same pose as a bird in a reference photo; however, you must change other elements such as the background, lighting, placement, and artistic style (e.g., coloring or shading techniques).
- Avoid creating a piece that replicates a reference image exactly. Instead, combine multiple references to form a unique composition.
 - For example, you might use one photo for your bird's anatomy, another for the background, and another for color inspiration.
- Looking at artwork by other artists can be a great source of inspiration, but do not copy their work. Instead, study their style and techniques to develop your own.

Creative Writing Specifications:

- **Not required for students in grades K–3 or for international participants.**
- Limit to one page, front only, typed or handwritten.
- **Include the student's name, grade, and home state** on either the front or back
- Writing may take many forms, such as a story, poem, comic, journal entry, interview, or magazine article.
- It should reflect the **student's knowledge, connection, or understanding of the selected fish or shark species.**
- Writing may include illustrations or decorative elements, but the words must be the main focus.

Entry Form Requirements:

- **All entries must be submitted via the online entry form**, regardless of whether artwork is mailed in or uploaded.
- Mailing instructions will be provided after online form submission.
- The entry form must include:
 - An email and mailing address for the artist or supervising adult.
 - Signatures from both the artist and supervising adult.
- If submitting 2D artwork online, please **scan the artwork (not photograph)** for the best quality. Crop the image so that the artwork fills the frame (no borders).

Yes!



No



No



See the difference? Scans better capture the artwork details (left).

Returning Mailed Artwork (U.S. Participants Only):

- U.S. school teachers submitting **2 or more entries** from a formal public or private school will receive **free return shipping**.
- All other U.S. participants who wish to have their artwork returned must:
 - Include a \$10 return fee (check payable to Wildlife Forever or purchase online).
 - If mailing as a group (e.g., siblings), only one \$10 fee is required to return all grouped entries.
 - If purchasing the return fee online, include the name of the student(s) who submitted artwork by mail.
- Returned entries will **include a physical certificate of participation**.

International Participants:

- **Creative writing is not required** for any international participants.
- If you choose to send your entry by mail, please know that we will not be able to return it.



Thank You for Participating in the Fish Art Contest!

Please reach out to info@wildlifeforever.org with any questions.

