10th Minnesota River Congress

Kato Ballroom Mankato MN

5-17-18

The 10th Minnesota River Congress was attended by 83 basin-wide organizational representatives and individuals.

The event kicked off with the Networking Fair which was a good opportunity for folks from all over the basin to trade ideas and interact with those working to improve conditions in our river system. Informative displays and information was exhibited by some of the following groups. The Crystal Waters Project, Minnesota Farmers Union, MPCA, MNDNR, LeSueur River Watershed Network, Mankato Paddling and Outings Club, Paddle for Progress, The Joseph Brown Center, Scott County WMO NRCS, Pioneer Public Television and River Ramble bike tour.

Initial comments from Facilitator/Coordinator Scott Sparlin were given recognizing the various sponsors of the Congress and recognition to team member Julie Beatty for her work on the new web site. He shared inspiration on the value of the entire Minnesota River system and the sometime seldom thought of aspects of why we are working to improve it. At the completion of his comments he performed two of his musical compositions accompanied by his guitar both of which had to do with the subject.

A plea to help with identifying drainage improvement projects which are being applied for across the basin was given by former U.S. Congressman David Minge.

Three different organizations, The Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and the Friends of the Minnesota Valley are working to create a way for all proposed projects to be reported to a central collection point to be made readily available for review, comment and if needed action. He noted that if anyone was aware of such project they should contact any of the organizations mentioned or they can contact the Minnesota River Congress and it will be forwarded.

Following Mr. Minge’s comments, a presentation was given by Chris Lenhart with the University of Minnesota. He presented findings of a new report done for the Izaak Walton League which looks at data previously collected on flow rates of the river in a new way. It concluded that with the same approximate rates of rainfall the river was receiving more water off the landscape and at an accelerated rate. The only variables were increased intensity of rain events and the increase of tile installation.

The next presentation was from Jay Gustafson with “Paddle for Progress” project. He is attempting to canoe and document each of the state water trails as designated by the MNDNR. Last year he canoed the Minnesota River and pointed out that a good deal of the information available from the agency was incomplete, incorrect or non-existent. He plans on canoeing and documenting most or all the others in 2018 and writing a report with recommendations when he is finished. He encouraged people to report such things as lack of signage or when an access is not accessible or in disrepair. He will be working to increase accessibility to our river system in the future and to see more opportunities for multiple day, family-oriented user safe trips.

Ron Bolduan, wildlife photographer and explorer and Scott Kudelka MNDNR specialist were the next presenters. They showed numerous pictures and presented the wild side of the river and people interacting with it. Together they do programs to all ages and all backgrounds throughout the Spring, Summer and Fall. With the new improvements to the Riverside History and Nature Learning Center, Ron as Curator hopes to be able to do winter presentations inside this upcoming year as well. Both men are available to do presentations.

The last presentation was from Ann Lewandowski with the University of Minnesota about one of our priority resolutions, that being soil organic matter increase. She explained the many facets involved in the definition of it and how it increases can be accomplished. It often is a complicated set of sequential actions which will allow micro-organisms to grow and flourish which in turn can hold significantly more precipitation. She announced that she has been appointed the new head of the Minnesota Office of Soil Health and will be in that position going forward.