

For immediate release: May 2, 2016

Contact: Scott Sparlin, 507-276-2280, [sesparlin@gmail.com](mailto:sesparlin@gmail.com); Ted Suss, (507) 828-3377, [tedsuss@gmail.com](mailto:tedsuss@gmail.com); Forrest Peterson, 320-441-9772, [forrestwpeterson@gmail.com](mailto:forrestwpeterson@gmail.com)

## **Support level rising for Minnesota River Congress plans and actions**

A new 'voice' in the Minnesota River basin includes more than 50 participating organizations. Growing over the past two years, they are assembling under the banner of the Minnesota River Congress.

With organizational details nearly complete, the Congress is gearing up for action in a variety of areas focusing on the natural resource and economic health of the Minnesota River basin.

Covering much of the southern third of the state, the Minnesota River basin holds about 14 million acres, more than 700,000 people among cities and in the countryside, and thousands of farms and industries.

Its geography is unique: Rich soil left by ancient glaciers, now prime prairie farm land, gouged by a massive pre-historic river, its vast river bed threaded by the current Minnesota River. In 13 separate watersheds comprising the basin, tributary streams and rivers drain the surrounding prairie towns and farms.

But the basin's land and water face major challenges. Excessive pollutants threaten water quality. Agriculture juggles the demand for crop and livestock production with the challenges of economics, public policy, sustainability, and the weather. Towns and small cities strive for economic growth, while dealing with costly demands for drinking water and waste water treatment.

Congress organizers believe that an important way to meet the challenges is through a concerted, basin-wide effort, according to Scott Sparlin, who is facilitating the Congress organizational development.

"We've been working the past two years on carefully creating a welcoming inclusive basin-wide organization, but now people want to hear about actions," Sparlin says.

Already, outside the Congress, several initiatives have been floated: Sen. Kathy Sheran, DFL-Mankato, introduced a bill in the Legislature to create a Minnesota River Commission; state bond funds are being sought for a new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Sen. Sheran said upland water storage and managed drainage systems are needed to reduce sediment and dredging in the lower Minnesota River basin. "Some type of unified action covering the entire basin is necessary," Sen. Sheran said.

The Congress Action Board is scheduled to meet May 16 in Henderson to wrap up organizational details, and then turn loose nine specific 'interest network' teams. "Several teams have already undertaken actions in their interest focus area," Sparlin says.

Earlier Congress meetings generated primary focus areas, such as public policy, land and water management, communications, education, natural resource restoration, recreation, economic growth, and citizen involvement. Attendees filled out surveys showing their areas of interest and future participation. Since that time, others have joined one or more of the Interest Network Teams as they

continue to grow in size and capability. Interested parties from the public are encouraged to join a team of their interest and begin to assist in collective actions.

The Action Board includes 34 representatives from agriculture, industry, natural resources, recreation, economic development, tourism, all levels of government, faith communities, first nations, and watershed organizations.

A smaller management committee, to be confirmed by the full Board, will handle administrative duties: Scott Sparlin, Jessica Nelson, Kim Musser, Ted Suss, and Forrest Peterson. For more information about the Congress or how to join an Interest Network Team, contact Sparlin or any of the management committee members.