

Scott E. Sparlin  
Coordinator/Facilitator  
Minnesota River Congress  
PO Box 488  
New Ulm MN 56073  
[507 276 2280](tel:5072762280)  
[sesparlin@gmail.com](mailto:sesparlin@gmail.com)

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The Honorable Mark Dayton  
Governor of the State of Minnesota  
116 Veterans Service Building  
20 West 12th Street  
St. Paul, MN 56073

Dear Governor Dayton,

Our 10th Minnesota River Congress will be held Thursday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at Turner Hall in New Ulm Minnesota on the midway point of our river. We and our 11 county Region VI Soil and Water Conservation District invite you to join us and kick off our 10th congress with any inspiration you can give us. We applaud and wholeheartedly support your focus of statewide water quality improvement during your term of office.

This letter explains very briefly, the history of the Minnesota River Congress and how we the citizens arrived at this point.

In 1989 the modern day movement to clean up pollution in the Minnesota River began. At that time the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) along with a number of other state and federal agencies, colleges and universities were in the process of completing the most recent truly comprehensive Minnesota River Assessment Project. With the public becoming aware of the preliminary findings, news began to spread due to the efforts of citizen activism at the time. Residents from up and down the river began to organize and asked other prominent organizations and concerned citizens to join forces to begin an awareness and education initiative with calls for action.

In 1992 the MPCA convened a "Citizens Advisory Committee" to begin a process of developing a set of recommendations to restore water quality to our river system. Working over two years they developed a set of 10 recommendations. Those 10 recommendations still ring true today. One recommendation was to restore the floodplain of the Minnesota River, which at the time, given the cultural climate, seemed like a quite unattainable goal. But some of the advisory committee flew to Washington D. C. lobbied several key individuals and helped to eventually secure the federal portion of the funding. Later, after much debate and a change in leadership the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) for the Minnesota River was born. It was incredibly successful with more than 100,000 acres of formerly cropped flood land permanently restored as part of the river.

Another recommendation was to create a "Minnesota River Commission" to oversee and monitor the governmental initiative to clean up the river. That recommendation resulted in

legislation creating the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board, which shaped the next 20 years of government oversight. This new entity later became the Minnesota River Board (MRB), composed of 37 county commissioners, one representing each county in the watershed. They were charged with oversight and coordination as well as outreach and information-sharing along with several other duties. That entity voted to disband as of April 1, 2013 and subsequently requested that the State of Minnesota essentially take over their former responsibilities, which had been laid out in statute.

Meanwhile, over the past 25 years the citizen component of the modern day movement to restore health to the river system was still chugging along, experiencing a number of successes despite many obstacles and challenges. Numerous citizen groups still are quite active in the basin and have succeeded in engaging the public and making all residents aware of their personal stake and part in its improvement.

In light of the dissolution of the Minnesota River Board, I along with a number of my colleagues met and began a process to reorganize, unify and bolster our collective efforts called the Minnesota River Congress. This occurred because we felt no movement or desire existed at the state level to develop an all-inclusive and genuinely inviting entity. The vision was and is to use democratic process and utilize an entity that is willing to work with all those previously not included and sometimes even viewed as adversarial. This has meant communicating and working directly with Agribusiness and Ag Producers as well as all affected government entities and citizens in a decision-making role. We have been created to assist and develop real and sincere actions and initiatives designed to improve and protect future water quality. No one community of interest or business under this vision has a dominant role over another and it is citizen-led.

Since June of 2013 we have held ten Minnesota River Congresses, six basin wide listening sessions, seven organization team meetings and 18 action board meetings bringing us to the current point. Based on feedback, response and participation have been significant and positive for the most part.

Our web site, <https://mnriver.wixsite.com/mnrivercongress> has much information on us and will help to give you a detailed picture of our presence in the basin. Please feel free to contact me as soon as possible if you are interested. If you are planning anything special, of which we may be unaware and may be directed at our watershed, please announce it at that time if you choose to come.

On behalf of all Minnesota River Congress participants,

Sincerely,

Scott E. Sparlin Coordinator/Facilitator