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## **Citizen group ready for economic, natural resource action in Minnesota River basin**

A citizen-led group focusing on the natural resource and economic health of the Minnesota River basin will transform from organizing to action at the sixth Minnesota River Congress March 10 at the New Ulm Event Center.

Congress participants and Action Board will act on remaining board elections, annual meeting date, and launch action groups in specific interest areas. The measures were advanced by the Congress Action Board meeting Jan. 26 in New Ulm.

“We’ve come a long way since the first Congress back in June of 2014,” said Scott Sparlin, of the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and Congress facilitator. “Now is the time for action. We need everyone to help create and carry out actions shaping our future in the entire Minnesota River valley.”

The Congress will open with a networking fair at 4:30 p.m. at the New Ulm Event Center, 301 20th St. So. A lasagna dinner will be served at 6 p.m. At 6:45 p.m. Brian Hicks, a farmer from Tracy, and Tony Sindt of the DNR, will give short presentations about cropland drainage research and Minnesota River fish species. The Congress meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.

“After the old Minnesota River Board disbanded, numerous people believed that some type of group focused on the entire Minnesota River basin was still a critical need to help accomplish basin-wide goals,” Sparlin said.

Since the first Congress, accomplishments include: Conducting five well-attended Congress meetings, six regional listening sessions, creating an Action Board, identifying specific interest areas and recruiting participants, and incorporation as a non-profit organization.

The Action Board includes representatives from the 13 watersheds in the basin, business, agriculture, local government, recreation, and state agencies.

Current Action Board vacancy categories are: One each from Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Minnesota River headwaters, Pomme de Terre River, Dept. of Transportation, and two from Native American communities. More information about the Congress including a list of Action Board categories is available online at [www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com/](http://www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com/).

At the fifth meeting Nov. 12, 2015 the Congress voted to conditionally support proposed legislation ([Senate File 2204](#)) creating a Minnesota River Commission. “While we have offered conditional support, we are emphasizing that this is separate from the Congress,” Sparlin said. “We have heard of opposition to the proposed bill from some existing groups, and want to make sure that this is not confused with the Congress.”

Registration for the Congress is available online at <https://payableform.appspot.com/forms/avm4p>, or by mail to Minnesota River PO Box 488, New Ulm, MN 56073. Make checks payable to the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River. The cost is \$15 in advance, and \$20 at the door. There is no charge for young adults under 19 or with a college ID. Online registration for the networking fair is available at: <https://payableform.appspot.com/forms/4q7bz> .

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