

The 4th Minnesota River Congress
Thursday July 23rd 2015
4:30 to 8:30 PM Held at Turner Halle New Ulm, MN

SUMMARY

The doors opened for registration to the 4th Minnesota River Congress (MRC) at 4:30 with a Networking Fair which has been held prior to all congresses to date. Back buy popular demand people from all parts of the basin with diverse backgrounds were able to discuss projects, initiatives, farming, fishing and all things Minnesota River Watershed related.

A meal was served at 5:45 PM and a pre-congress program was presented at 6:35 P.M. Congress participants were welcomed with opening comments from Scott Sparlin who has been acting as the (MRC) Organizational Team facilitator. MNDNR Regional Director Dennis Frederickson spoke on the importance of working together in being as inclusive as possible to gain multiple perspectives. He added that the Minnesota River Watershed was a big area and needed to be managed on a watershed basis with broad oversight for a comprehensive approach in which ideas and knowledge could be shared freely. He encouraged the congress to continue down its current path using the democratic unifying approach it has established to date.

The next speaker to address the congress was State Representative Clark Johnson. He also encouraged the MRC to continue to attempt to unify the diversity in the basin by being as inclusive as possible and to find commonalities among the various communities of interest. He felt the MRC has been on the right track from the beginning and that democracy moves sometimes slower than people want, but that it pushes us to understand the complexities of our resources and people. He stated that if a Minnesota River Commission bill was introduced in the Minnesota House of Representatives that he would gladly co-sponsor such a bill.

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District then gave a presentation on the Minnesota River Commission bill which has been introduced by Minnesota State Senator Kathy Sheran. They explained that they are the entity which is responsible for keeping and paying for the maintenance of the Lower 25 miles of the Minnesota River for barge traffic. Costs have increased at a rapid rate over

the course of the past 10 years and space is also becoming a premium for storage of the dredge spoils. They contest that an acceleration of actions and initiatives is needed to significantly reduce sediment loads making their way downstream. They feel targeting upland storage and managed drainage systems will be needed to succeed in the area of sediment reductions because of what the most recent scientific data has revealed. They made the current proposed commission bill available to attendee's and links to it are available on line. It was acknowledged that the current bill's form will be further examined and is in a state of open discussion for potential changes.

The next presentation was introduced by Dennis Frederickson and given by the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Tom Landwehr. He built on the notion that big things often come from small groups which grow with time and as that happens it reaches a tipping point with the public. He encouraged the MRC to continue to practice the democratic approach and to continue to be inclusive to all who show passion and interest no matter what their walk of life. He also shared the importance of a watershed based approach with oversight which will be needed in the future to accomplish the goals for a healthier set of resources in the basin which are obviously linked to one another.

The last presentation prior to official congress business was given by State Representative Paul Torkelson who is also the co-chair of the Legislative Water Commission. Mr. Torkelson also shared that watershed based management of our surface water resources was the best way to ensure outcomes and have accountability for cleaner surface water. He spoke of the Governor's buffer initiative and the misconceptions and challenges associated with negotiations and that in the end no one was completely happy with it, but he felt that it was a step in the right direction. He also stated that the congress was on the right track and needed to continue to be inclusive by asking as broad an audience as possible to participate.

The official business portion of the 4th Minnesota River Congress started with a review and discussion of the prioritized purpose statements for the MRC. After thorough explanation from organization team member Warren Formo a motion was made and seconded to adopt the prioritized purpose statements as presented. A vote was then taken and the motion carried unanimously.

The next item under consideration for adoption was the action board structure description document which will be used for clarification and explanation purposes in the future. This was presented by organization team member Bob Finley. After a thorough explanation, discussion and questions a motion and a second were made to adopt the action board structure description as written. The motion to adopt passed on a unanimous vote.

Linda Meschke a member of the organization team then presented the Minnesota River Congress organization structure chart. After examination and discussion along with questions and further clarifications the chart was adopted as presented by a motion with a second and unanimous vote in favor of adoption.

The business portion of the congress continued with an examination, review and discussion on the action board application form. A complete description was given and after much further discussion a motion was made and seconded to approve the action board application form as presented and for the MRC to adopt it as an official document. The vote was unanimous in favor.

The next item of business was a presentation by the organization team facilitator Scott Sparlin to begin a process of filing for articles of incorporation as a Minnesota Non Profit under statute 317 A and to begin the process for filing as a federal tax exempt 501 c 3 organization. This was approved by the full congress vote on April 16th 2015 at the 3rd session.

Lastly the consideration of endorsing the Minnesota River Commission by the full congress was tabled until our November 12th, 2015 5th Congress. It was felt that a period of modification to the bill would be taking place and that most attendee's needed to read the current bill and give it as much thought as possible before endorsement. The bill is under Minnesota State Senate File 2204. The bill has been voted on and endorsed in spirit by the organization team for the MRC.

Having no further business, The Minnesota River Congress adjourned at 8:45 P.M.