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## Minnesota River Congress organized and ready to launch March 10

New Ulm, Minn. – The sixth Minnesota River Congress will be held Thursday, March 10 at the Turner Hall in New Ulm.

The citizen-led group focusing on the natural resource and economic health of the Minnesota River basin will take action on bylaws, remaining board elections, and annual meeting date. The measures were advanced by the Congress Action Board meeting Jan. 26 in New Ulm.

Covering much of the southern third of the state, the Minnesota River basin holds nearly 11 million acres, more than 700,000 people, and thousands of farms and industries.

Its geography is unique: Prime prairie farm land incised by a deep and mile-wide ancient riverbed threaded by the current Minnesota River. Within the basin, tributaries form 13 separate watersheds.

The Congress is open to everyone interested in the economic, social, and natural resource vitality of the basin. It aims to include all groups among agriculture, industry, natural resources, recreation, economic development, tourism, government, faith communities, first nations, and watershed organizations.

“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. “After the old Minnesota River Board disbanded, a lot of people still believed that we needed some type of group focused on the entire Minnesota River basin.”

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 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.

[Some](#) ~~ever~~al positions remain open on the Action Board, and interest survey forms are always welcome, Sparlin said. Current Action Board vacancy categories include: [1](#) Soil and Water Conservation District [representatives](#), Native American communities (two), Minnesota River headwaters, Pomme de Terre River, and Dept. of Transportation. 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 the Congress voted to 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.”

More details about the sixth Congress March 10 will be announced later. The schedule for the previous meetings included a ‘networking fair’ starting at 4 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m., and the Congress meeting at 7 p.m. For more information contact Scott Sparlin, 507-276-2280, [sesparlin@gmail.com](mailto:sesparlin@gmail.com).