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## Minnesota River Congress to build on policies and initiatives of existing organizations

The Minnesota River Congress will be hosting meetings in six communities to inventory policies among the scores of groups and individuals working for the economic and natural resource health of the river basin. This will guide the Congress as it develops a public statement of policies and actions.

“We know that many passionate people in the Minnesota River basin have ideas for policy statements that might be included in the Minnesota River Congress policy statement,” says Scott Sparlin, Congress facilitator. “We are asking everyone interested to attend one of six meetings in the Minnesota Basin and submit those items you feel are appropriate for inclusion in our final statement and agenda.”

Meeting schedule: All meetings begin at 7 PM

- Tuesday, Aug. 23, Fairmont: Knights of Columbus Hall, 920 East 10th St.
- Tuesday, Sept. 6, Mankato: Good Counsel Academy, 170 Good Counsel Dr. Room 005.
- Tuesday, Sept. 13, New Auburn: New Auburn City Hall 8303 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- Wednesday, Sept. 14, Bloomington: Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, 6601 Auto Club Road.
- Tuesday, Sep. 20, Granite Falls: Granite Falls Lutheran Church, 350 9th Ave.
- Thursday, Sept 22, Morton: Jackpot Junction 39375 Co. Rd. 24 2<sup>nd</sup> floor ballroom.

The eventual Congress public policy statement and agenda will be approved at the seventh full Minnesota River congress meeting Thursday, Nov. 17. The location will be announced later.

“We need everyone’s help to build the Congress policy and agenda,” says Sparlin. “Please submit items that have a basin-wide and significant impact. Items that call for specific and measurable action by the Minnesota River Congress. And please submit items that include background information supporting the policy you are advocating.”

The Congress Action Board met Aug. 10 in Redwood Falls to hear progress on the policy inventory process, reports from specific interest teams, and plan the upcoming meetings. 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.

Everyone is welcome and encouraged to participate in one or more of eight interest teams of the congress, in areas such as: Public policy, land and water management, communications, education, natural resource restoration, recreation, economic growth, and citizen involvement. More information about the Congress is available online at: <http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com/>.

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.

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