

June 2023 Environmental Quality Board meeting

Wednesday, June 21 from 1 – 4 p.m. Join in person or online

<https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/EOB%20June%202023%20Packet%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

Memo

Date: June 9, 2023

To: Members of the Environmental Quality Board

From: Catherine Neuschler, Executive Director and Kayla Walsh, ER Program Administrator

RE: Environmental Congress Planning

Since last year, there has been ongoing discussion about hosting an Environmental Congress in 2023. Per Minnesota Statute 116C.04, subd. 7,

At its discretion, the board shall convene an annual Environmental Quality Board congress including, but not limited to, representatives of state, federal and regional agencies, citizen organizations, associations, industries, colleges and universities, and private enterprises who are active in or have a major impact on environmental quality. The purpose of the congress shall be to receive reports and exchange information on progress and activities related to environmental improvement.

Environmental Congress events have been held sporadically since the 1980s. The most recent was held in 2019, with the theme “the climate for action is changing”. The stated goals were “to learn about innovative climate work happening across the state and explore ways to apply solutions in your community.”

Goals and Expected Outcomes

As described in the statute, the purpose of the congress is an exchange of information on progress and activities related to environmental improvement. We believe the congress should also provide a strong showing of an “all of Minnesota” (holistic, connected, integrated) effort on environmental issues, beginning with climate and expanding to consider other topics that need this kind of approach.

Following up on the 2019 climate work, attendees should come away from the event with an understanding of the progress being made and activities being undertaken to respond to climate change, especially through Minnesota’s climate action framework and new state and federal laws. They know who is leading which actions, where to plug in, and what they can do.

Expanding from climate work, a goal is for attendees to hear about and discuss key topics in environmental protection that need an “all of Minnesota” effort with new and innovative actions.

Key outcomes include:

- Report the progress Minnesota is making in climate action
- Demonstrate an “all of Minnesota” approach to climate – show that the pieces are embedded in the work of all agencies
- Engage Minnesotans on the work of EQB and future strategies for environmental quality, especially around identified topic areas that need new approaches
- Advance networking, planning, and action

The Congress should also allow for:

- Learning about the role of EQB and considering the role EQB could play on key environmental issues

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- Effective engagement around environmental issues through conversations that demonstrate a One Minnesota effort toward tackling environmental issues
- Improved understanding of state agency actions and how others can connect and partner with environmental programs
- Gaining input on what other actions or issues EQB and member agencies can take to protect their environment

Theme and Plan

The preliminary plan is to develop a half-day event that is primarily in person, with one Metro location and three regional locations around Minnesota. We envision this event would likely happen in mid-November.

While some speakers/presentations might be pre-recorded or live streamed from a central location, a key goal will to be encourage conversation at the in-person locations.

There would be essentially three blocks or themes of programming. These include:

- Welcome
 - A welcome address
 - Introduction to/reminder of the role of the EQB
- **Climate** – Past requests were to continue a climate focus; this follows up on the 2019 “the climate for action is changing” with clear identification of actions that are occurring
 - A report out on the work of the Climate Action Framework
 - Updates on upcoming state work (climate pollution reduction grant to access federal funding)
 - Discussion on climate (input on upcoming state work, discussion on climate justice)
- **Look Back and Look Forward** – Many key environmental laws have reached their 50th birthdays; this looks at what they have done well and what gaps and opportunities exist for the future
 - Review key state (Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, public water law) and federal laws (Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act)
 - Identify what problems they have addressed well
 - Call out that environmental issues have evolved - identify the different environmental challenges we face and the different considerations needed
 - Demonstrate that different approaches will be needed moving forward
 - Speaker or panel on a topic that needs a new approach, followed by facilitated discussion
 - One topic would be chosen for each location – the topic could be focused on a regional environmental issue or on better tools and approaches for reaching environmental outcomes

Next Steps

- Agree on general approach
- Identify regional locations, and board members who could host at each one
- Evaluate the need for a steering committee or state agency support on each agenda block
- Identify potential topics for breakout discussions, as well as preferred locations
- Identify speakers for each topic
- Identify funding needs and sources