

January 18, 2013

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Environmental Quality Board, I would like to thank every one of the Minnesota citizens who attended the Environmental Congress Citizen Forums last November and December. It was a wonderful opportunity to have candid conversations with a wide array of Minnesotans about their concerns and visions for our state's environment.

Attendance at the Minnesota Environmental Congress Citizen Forums far exceeded our expectations, totaling over 1200 Minnesotans total. I believe the high turnout was due to two main factors: excellent outreach by state agencies and many diverse interest groups, as well as a strong public desire to participate in these conversations. Staff and EQB members did an outstanding job of making every Forum a well-run and positive experience.

As required by EQB statute, we reached out to people from many different sectors: agriculture, conservation, mining, energy, forestry, environmental groups, chambers of commerce, local governments, elected officials, tribal governments, and colleges and universities. Representatives from all of these groups participated. We've received very positive feedback; people are excited to talk about these issues. Commissioners Stine, Landwehr, and I along with many other Commissioners and EQB members were there, giving citizens direct access to state leaders for many productive conversations.

At each Forum, Commissioners presented highlights from the Minnesota Environment and Energy Report Card, followed by staff-led small group discussions that asked participants about their top concerns for the next generation and their vision for the future. Top issues we heard about were silica sand mining, copper-nickel mining, water quality and groundwater depletion, climate change and energy, and wolf hunting. We heard repeatedly the need for regulation based on sound science, the need for more education about the environment, and the need for jobs and the economy to be balanced with environmental protection. All of the comments were recorded and staff are compiling them into a report. All the input will be posted online and a summary will be presented at the statewide Environmental Congress in March.

At each Forum we conducted clicker polling to learn about the participants and their priorities. Here is a quick summary of the results:

- A majority of participants were over age 45, and men outnumbered women significantly.
- Top priorities for water were nonpoint runoff and invasive species. We asked about priorities for land use as our state adds a million more people by 2030. In every Forum, the top priority was to encourage people to live in already developed areas. Other priorities that were selected included protecting parkland and habitat, and encouraging business development in already developed areas.
- For nonpoint air pollution, the top priority at every Forum was to improve vehicle efficiency. We asked how much renewable energy Minnesota should have by 2050, and the largest group in every Forum selected "as much as possible" and a solid majority in all but one Forum wanted at least 50% renewable energy by 2050.
- The top priority in every Forum for meeting our greenhouse gas goals was to invest in technology to save energy.

We had a limited number of clickers (185), so we were not able to poll every attendee. This was not a scientific survey, but the results do give an indication of what Minnesotans think, especially where we saw common trends across regions.

I, along with the other EQB members, again want to sincerely thank every one of you who took the time to attend a Citizen Forum and submit your comments. This is our state and our future; every voice matters.

Sincerely,



David J. Frederickson  
Commissioner, Department of Agriculture  
Chair, Environmental Quality Board