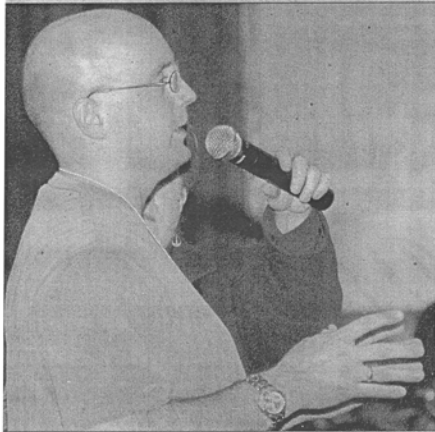




A common vision



Minnesota River summit rallies stewards

By Troy Krause

Editor

The Minnesota River watershed is cleaner today than it was 15 years ago.

Data collected in various sites along the river have shown that.

The reality, however, is that there is still a long way to go before those with an interest in a clean river are going to be able to say it has reached the level former Gov. Arne Carlson proposed in 1992.

Finding a common vision for the next 15 years and beyond is what brought a variety of people representing various entities from local governments to non profit stewardship organizations together this past Wednesday and Thursday for a historical event.

RCRCA Executive Director Jim Doering (right) talks about the data that has been collected on the Minnesota River in recent years.

A summit on the Minnesota River was held in New Ulm.

According to those involved with planning the summit, this was the first gathering of its kind since Carlson launched the Minnesota River Clean Up Movement to address making the river swimmable and fishable again.

"This is a historical event, said Patrick Moore, director of Clean Up the River Environment, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the river's quality.

"There have been meetings to talk about the scientific data that has been collected, but there has never been a meeting like this."

The summit, added Moore, was held to celebrate the successes and talk about problems.

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"We need to advance the vision," Moore said.

The common vision discussed by the summit attendees is to continue the progress being made at the grassroots level along the river and to utilize the network of people that was developed during the summit to collaborate on projects and events held to enhance awareness and improve the river's quality.

What made the summit unique is that it not only included both rural and metro individuals it also brought in organizations, such as those in the ag industry, to provide others a different perspective.

It is no secret that the ag industry has been the whipping boy for those in environmental circles who are looking for ways to clean up the river.

In fact, toward the end of its summit, an individual spoke up about addressing the seven million acres of bare land that exist along the river.

That comment was met with a response from a farmer in the audience who said there are a number of farmers who have changed the way they operate as it relates to prevention of soil erosion.

Jim Doering, executive director of the Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Association, said it is important to identify the areas where success has been made and to look at the quantifiable data to see what has been done.

There are, said Doering, places within that seven million acre area where successes have been demonstrated.

"What we need to do is

target the ones that aren't," Doering said.

The reality is that those who farm the land are interested in conservation and improving the quality of the Minnesota River.

Dave Craigmile, a Lac Qui Parle County farmer, has been very involved in various activities to help improve the river, including helping to coordinate the summit.

He said farmers are using better tillage practices and planting techniques that are making a difference in addressing the issues that have been raised.

He added more farmers are identifying and creating wetlands on marginal land.

"We need people to know farmers are a friend of the river," Craigmile said.

Bob Finley of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency talked about some of the successes that have been made already along the river.

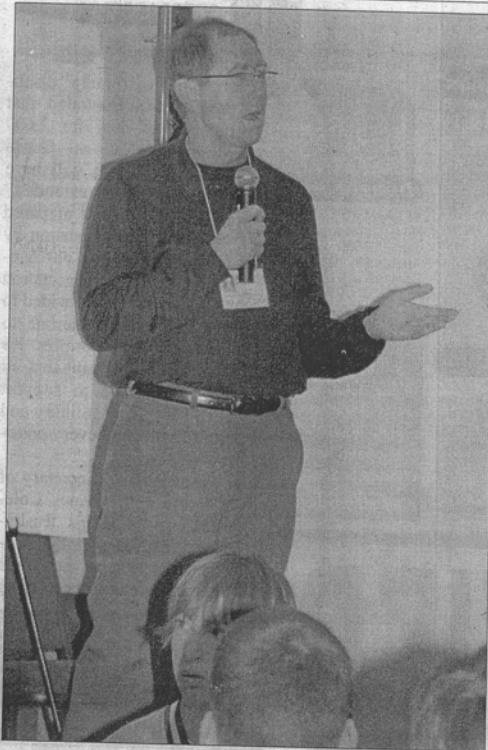
For example, more than 100,000 acres of land in the Minnesota River watershed have been placed into programs such as CREP, CRP and RIM.

He added in the neighborhood of 80 percent of communities along the river now have water treatment facilities. That number not that many years ago was closer to 20 percent.

Moore added the efforts have increased the wildlife habitat, adding there has been an increase in the wildlife seen in the watershed.

At the close of the summit Thursday morning, Finley offered a challenge to those who were in attendance.

"When you leave, think of the people you know who are working on the river," said Finley. "Get together with them and see how you can make a difference together."



Despite the fact that at times unique groups have different perspectives about the river, the reality is in the end they all share the need for the river in common.

"Human beings are imbedded in something greater than themselves,"

said Richard Smith, a Minneapolis anthropologist Thursday morning. "The river is part of that."

The summit allowed for big picture thinking and opened the door for big picture solutions as people look to fix the river.