

Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) is a statewide coalition of 80 environmental and conservation organizations that represent a combined membership of more than 450,000 Minnesotans. MEP's mission is to strengthen the effectiveness and build the power of our members to achieve the highest quality natural environment for Minnesotans. Our three key goals are to:

- Help our member groups become more effective and coordinated;
- Establish an informed, engaged and activated constituency of environmentally-aware Minnesota citizens; and
- Ensure that policy makers enact and implement policies that protect the health of Minnesota's environment and people.

MEP's work takes place through seven strategic program areas.

### ***Collaborative Public Policy Work***

Each year MEP's member organizations use a democratic process to select a set of priority issues that the community will work together on in collaboration. MEP is called upon for our expertise in public policy strategy, communications and community organizing to help move the priority issues forward using a well-rounded campaign. Issues MEP worked on this past year include:

#### *Safeguarding Investments for Minnesota's Future*

- The Legislature has fulfilled the promise of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment by authorizing more than \$300 million in new projects dedicated to protect Minnesota's Great Outdoors. This is one of the most comprehensive efforts to protect and restore Minnesota's water; preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat; and support state, regional and metro parks.
- The amendment allocations for the Great Outdoors contain:
- \$151 million for clean water projects including testing of all Minnesota waters in the next 10 years and implementation of clean-up programs.
- \$87.5 million to protect land and wildlife habitat, including the state's largest conservation easement of 187,000 acres for the Upper Mississippi Forest. In addition, there is \$63.5 million set aside for further land and wildlife habitat projects to be identified and authorized in 2011.
- \$65 million to support Minnesota's state, regional and metro parks.

#### *Driving Innovation: Clean Cars for Minnesota*

- Even though the Governor and the Legislature failed to adopt clean car standards in Minnesota for the second year in a row, the Obama administration announced plans on May 19 to enact a federal Clean Cars Standard. This new federal initiative will save Americans money, clean up our air and reduce global warming pollution from tailpipe emissions in all states across the country. The new federal standards will reduce tailpipe emissions by 30 percent by 2016, the same goal as in the proposed Minnesota Clean Car Standard legislation.
- With the new national clean car standard soon to be in place, we can now focus on other needed reforms to reduce global warming pollution here in Minnesota. We look forward to 2010 and a renewed commitment from the Governor and the Legislature to enact policies that will achieve Minnesota's requirement for an 80 percent reduction in global warming pollution by 2050.

#### *Building Sensible Communities*

- The Legislature and Governor took several steps to give Minnesotans more options about how they get around, helping to reduce global warming and air pollution, traffic congestion, and driving. These are a good start in changing how we build our communities, but more can and should be done.

- At the top of the list of positive steps is a change in school siting rules that gives communities more local control about where new schools are located. No longer will school districts be forced to build schools at the edge of town – sometimes in the middle of cornfields.
- Another legislative action will result in the Metropolitan Council helping communities determine how land use and transportation plans affect residents’ options about where they live and how they get around.

*Safe Mines to Protect Our Water*

- The Legislature failed to act this session on a proposal to assure that new sulfide mines are operated in a way that protects our lakes, rivers and streams from acid mine drainage. With inadequate laws on the books and sulfide mining proposals looming on the horizon, we cannot afford to delay efforts to protect Minnesotans from the problems that have accompanied sulfide mines in other states, including taxpayers left to pay exorbitant clean-up costs.

***Administrative and committee-based efforts***

MEP’s work to ensure the effective allocation of Clean Water, Land and Legacy funding was a significant priority for our organization. Immediately after the November passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment, MEP co-convened the diverse group of stakeholders that developed the original Clean Water Legacy Act. This group (known as the G-16) continued to meet throughout the legislative session to coordinate strategies on allocation of the water portion of the amendment funds. Our Executive Director also met with the Clean Water Council to discuss and develop priorities and strategies to use these funds to maximize implementation of the Clean Water Legacy with the new funds

MEP used its Weekly Update e-newsletter to publicize opportunities for member groups to engage in administrative channels to shape environmental policy. We posted agency vacancies for positions where environmental representation is needed such as the Clean Water Council and publicized opportunities to participate in public hearing and input sessions on issues such as feedlot siting, air emission and water quality permit fees, and the Wetland Conservation Act Rules.

MEP also convened meetings with state agency staff to ensure that our members are aware of, and have a voice in, key emerging issues. On July 13, MEP convened a members meeting with the MPCA on landfill siting rules as they pertain to groundwater contamination and a meeting with Barr Engineering on July 15 to learn about proposed sulfide mining operations that could also have a negative impact on groundwater. For example, on July 29, 2009 MEP convened a members meeting on the Forest BioEconomy Strategic Map being developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

MEP is in the midst of launching an effort to coordinate intensive watershed-based nonpoint runoff reduction and habitat protection work in two priority watersheds in the Lake Superior Basing and to leverage adequate funding for watershed protection and restoration efforts in the region.

***Communications and Research Development***

MEP conducted public opinion polling and developed messages to use in communicating about our 2009 collaborative issues. We conducted issue-specific trainings with the clusters of member

groups working on each issue and provided one-on-one media training with MEP spokespeople. More than 60 member group leaders participated in these communications trainings. MEP also provided communications training to community members from across the state as part of our seven Citizen Days at the Capitol.

MEP's paid and earned media efforts generated broad coverage of our collaborative issues. In all, we achieved 236 "press hits" on our collaborative agenda issues, including op eds, letters to the editor and quotes in print, radio and television news stories.

MEP's messaging also is used to shape our print and web-based communications materials on the collaborative agenda. We published our 2009 Minnesota Environmental Briefing Book as planned, as well as fact sheets on each issue and sections on our website (see attached).

To complement our work with conventional media sources, we also made extensive use of our *Loon Commons* blog ([www.looncommons.org](http://www.looncommons.org)). Posting to our blog has proven to be an easy way to share information and respond relatively quickly to new developments. And since we include a list of the five most recent blog posts in our daily News Watch that is sent to member groups, elected officials and members of the media, we were able to broaden the scope of potential readers. Since September 2008, the blog has had 11,141 page loads; 6,318 unique visitors; 5,129 first time visitors; and 1,189 returning visitors.

We convened and coordinated our Communications Group, which offers a forum for generating effective, coordinated media coverage of collaborative efforts — and helps our member groups' communications directors to share resources and explore new communications technologies. Our Electronic News Clip service was regularly sent as planned and continues to be a very popular service for our members.

MEP coordinated group sign on letters on 17 issues. Issues ranged from national issues such as the Clean Water Restoration Act to more localized issues like the Mississippi River Critical Area Reform Bill.

MEP's website, [www.mepartnership.org](http://www.mepartnership.org) continues to be a cornerstone of our online efforts, offering a "one stop shop" of information for citizens, environmental organizations, the media and others. Public use of MEP's website is growing steadily, with an average of more than 5,000 visits each month and we continue to manage sub-sites for member groups and clusters that need this service. MEP's Weekly Update e-newsletter now reaches 244 member group leaders and a public version is sent to 1,013 people.

To address changing technology, MEP is expanding our use of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter and the photo sharing site Flickr. We now have 166 'fans' on Facebook. As we gain new expertise in these areas we will provide training to member groups as well as applying these strategies to our collaborative efforts.

While MEP's data maps continue to be a valuable tool, much of the information is now available from other sources. To avoid duplicating efforts, MEP has made the decision not to invest in regular map updates.

### ***Fieldwork and citizen outreach***

MEP's fieldwork program is designed to actively engage key Greater Minnesota communities in environmental protection activities. Our goal is to build skills within these communities so they can better address local environmental concerns and participate in MEP's collaborative efforts at the state level. As noted in our previous report, MEP opened field offices and hired organizers in four strategically selected regions of the state: Austin/Albert Lea, Mankato/St. Peter, Winona/Rushford/Preston and Northwestern Minnesota. In addition, MEP has an established office in Duluth. Organizers are overseen by our Fieldwork Director who ensures that their work is well coordinated and effectively focused.

Over the past year, our fieldwork organizers have made great progress in strengthening the capacity of their communities to safeguard their environment. The organizers, who are all community members, generated stronger ties with MEP member groups in each region, and developed relationships with nontraditional partners, including faith-based organizations, civic groups and colleges. Sixty-eight community organizations are actively partnering with MEP in forums that reach their constituents. For example, in the Austin/Albert Lea area our organizer coordinated with MEP member group Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota and local churches to support "Caring for Creation" teams that engage church congregations in environmental activities.

Our organizers have convened numerous meetings, co-sponsored events and taken other actions that enhance the work of our member groups and achieve strengthened collaborations. In Winona, for example, our organizer has developed a network of more than 500 concerned citizens and established strong partnerships with a range of local leaders including county commissioners, city council members, professors from Winona State University and St. Mary's University and national leaders in organics and pesticide research.

Work to generate letters to the editor of local newspapers has been a particularly valuable strategy in our field regions. In all, 30 letters to the editor were printed in our field regions, providing an important forum for local citizens to voice their concerns in their community.

We have used a variety of strategies to engage citizens in the fieldwork regions in discussions with local decision-makers. We organized meetings prior to the start of the legislative session in the home districts of 27 legislators. In all we hosted events in 13 areas that were attended by 202 people. We hosted a regional Citizen's Day event for each of our fieldwork areas, a Metro Day, a western Minnesota day and a Duluth Day, engaging nearly 360 people in the seven events. We arranged numerous in-person meetings between citizens and their elected officials, as well as issue specific gatherings including Clean Car forums in Austin, Winona and Mankato that were attended by a total of 35 people. We also have helped turn people out to Town Hall Forums sponsored by decision-makers, to achieve a strong environmental presence.

Fieldwork organizers participate in weekly meetings to discuss strategy, share experiences and ensure that efforts are coordinated and focused on the goals of the program. Each field region recently developed an Advisory Team of community members to help guide our efforts and ensure that MEP's resources are addressing local needs and reaching the people that can make a difference on local and state environmental issues.

### ***Great Lakes initiatives***

The past year was a very busy time on numerous issues affecting the water quality of the Great Lakes. Due in part to enhanced coordination through the Great Lakes Agenda, MEP and its members were at the forefront of these issues, which included the following:

Metallic sulfide mining: Metallic sulfide mining is considered a top potential threat to water quality in the Great Lakes basin and the inclusion of this issue in MEP's 2009 collaborative agenda engaged a strong network of Great Lakes groups and citizens. While we were not successful in efforts to achieve statewide legislation to prevent this form of water pollution, our work served to raise the profile of the issue among our member groups, citizens and decision makers and set the state for future work on the issue.

Invasive aquatic species: MEP and its members engaged in work to reduce the spread of aquatic invasive species transported in ballast water. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) took action on a ballast water discharge program in September 2008. The program — which applies to all vessels that are over 50 meters in length and operate in Minnesota waters — requires the vessels to adopt Best Management Practices immediately and phases in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) standard. MEP continues to be engaged in federal level discussions on ballast water and is coordinating efforts with other states to make sure that the special needs of Lake Superior — which is cleaner than the other Great Lakes — are taken into account.

Great Lakes restoration: Congress reauthorized the Great Lakes Legacy Act, which provides funding for cleaning up toxic sediments in the Areas of Concern, including the St. Louis River. Our statewide citizen outreach, in concert with the Healing Our Waters (HOW) Coalition, helped build support for this effort.

Mercury pollution: Minnesota completed its mercury Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plan. Shaped by participation from MEP, the final implementation plan approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides a framework for decreasing mercury pollution of Minnesota waters, including the Lake Superior, as required by the Clean Water Act. The implementation plan has an annual air discharge target of 789 pounds and a water discharge limit of 24 pounds per year. Minnesota's statewide approach is a big step toward reducing atmospheric mercury emissions that impact all state waters, including the St. Louis River and Lake Superior. Even so, mercury levels in the St. Louis River are so high that additional measures will be required to remove impairments.

Water Resources Compact: The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, which Minnesota was the first state to pass in 2007, was passed by Congress and signed into law in August 2008. MEP has been actively involved in this effort, which will prevent water diversions from the Great Lakes.

### ***Electronic outreach systems***

In 2008 MEP gained access to the Catalist — a database of more than four million Minnesotans with detailed information on demographics, voting history, environmental concerns and other data. The database was updated significantly through micro-targeting — which used survey data to identify demographic attributes of people likely to support environmental efforts and act on their values. As a result, all files in the Catalist now have a “score” that flags them as potential supporters on various issues. Within specific target areas of the state, we are able to sort out the citizens with the highest scores, contact them and ask them to call their decision-makers or participate in our meetings and forums. The Catalist has significantly expanded the pool of citizens available for our mobilization efforts and we used the system very effectively in 2009 to generate awareness and support of our collaborative issues.

MEP's website, [www.mepartnership.org](http://www.mepartnership.org) continues to be a cornerstone of our online efforts, offering a “one stop shop” of information for citizens, environmental organizations, the media and others. Public use of MEP's website is growing steadily, with an average of more than 5,000

visits each month. The Northeast Minnesota section of our site functions as a clearinghouse for information on the Great Lakes, and we significantly expanded this section of the site over the past year. We continue to manage sub-sites for member groups and clusters that need this service and use of our blog, [www.looncommons.org](http://www.looncommons.org), continues to grow.

To address changing technology, MEP is expanding our use of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter and the photo sharing site Flickr. As we gain new expertise in these areas we will provide training to member groups as well as applying these strategies to our collaborative efforts.

Citizens engaged through the fieldwork program, as well as other citizens in our consolidated member group database, were effectively mobilized to make calls and send e-mails to decision-makers using our Rapid Response Phone System and Minnesota Environmental Action Network.

In the past year, we activated our Rapid Response phone system on 15 collaborative agenda projects. We contacted more than 3,400 citizens and generated 2,458 calls to legislators at key decision points.

MEP and our member organizations initiated nine alerts using the Environmental Action email network during the grant period, generating a total of 701 emails, faxes, letters and phone calls to decision-makers on our collaborative agenda.

#### ***Capacity-building and convening***

MEP's capacity building and training work over the past year included a December 15, 2008 communications training where we shared the results of our polling research and messaging related to the 2009 collaborative agenda. We also conducted trainings with each of our four issue clusters on specific messaging of their issue and one on one media training with MEP spokespeople. More than 60 member group leaders participated in these communications trainings. MEP also provided communications training as part of our seven Citizen Days at the Capitol.

On January 8, MEP's lobbyist, John Tuma presented workshop titled "Lobbying 101" for MEP's members and field staff. The workshop attracted more than 20 member participants and was particularly popular among our up and coming stars in the environmental community as they get their feet wet at the Capitol.

On January 9, MEP hosted an in-depth training on each of the four collaborative agenda initiatives. This program was attended by more than 30 individuals and was praised as being a highly valuable service. Organizers felt more confident in going out into the public to discuss the issues and were more knowledgeable than in previous years.

MEP and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Duluth (UUCD) Peace and Justice committee co-sponsored the Citizens in Action workshop, an event held annually in Duluth in January to train citizens in basic skills for community involvement. More than 100 people attended this year's event.

MEP again offered scholarships to our member organizations to attend training sponsored by other organizations such as the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and the Institute for Conservation Leadership. MEP staff tried the new strategy of using a "member buddy" system

to make sure our members were aware of these opportunities and we saw an increase in the number of scholarships sought out by members this year. In all, \$834 in scholarships was granted to member groups this year to attend nine different workshops.

MEP hosted five large meetings for our members in the past year. We organized two member breakfast meetings with Congressman Keith Ellison the first focusing on ethanol and the second on green jobs.

On September 29, 2008, MEP coordinated a very well received speaking engagement by John Austin in Duluth. Austin is senior fellow with the Brookings Institution and author of several reports on the importance of the health of the Great Lakes to the region's economy. The events served to forge new connections between economic and conservation interests and cooperating groups included Minnesota Power, Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, Area Partnership for Economic Expansion, Clean Water Action, St. Louis River Citizens Action Committee, and the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District.

On November 17, 2008, MEP convened a Member Meeting with Jon Foley, director of the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota. Foley spoke about the work of the institute and the impacts of global climate change across the globe and closer to home. There was good dialogue with members about how to collaborate in the future to address these environmental challenges.

On June 11, 2009 MEP held its annual meeting, which included Board elections and other business as well as a panel discussion with six 2010 Gubernatorial hopefuls. Lori Sturdevant from the Star Tribune did a wonderful job moderating the panel as the gubernatorial hopefuls responded to questions about global warming solutions, toxics reduction, sustainable agriculture, and transit.

**In addition to our traditional strategic program areas, MEP took on the special role of coordinator of outreach and education efforts around the Clean Water, Lands and Legacy Amendment**

As the coordinator of nonprofit, educational work on this issue, MEP played a lead role in this effort. During the 2009 legislative session we also led efforts to ensure that funds generated through the Amendment are directed as voters intended and not diverted to fill budget gaps. In part due to our collaborative efforts, the 2009 allocation includes more than \$300 million in new projects dedicated to protect Minnesota's Great Outdoors including \$151 million in clean water projects.