

Testimony to the Subcommittee on Water Policy

12-7-20

From Scott Sparlin, Executive Director, Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and
Coordinator/Facilitator for the Minnesota River Congress.

Mr. Chair and Members, My name is Scott Sparlin, I am the Executive Director for the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and Coordinator for the Minnesota River Congress. I live in the heart of Minnesota River Valley in New Ulm, Brown County. The organizations I work for have been advocating on behalf of clean water and our state's namesake river for the past 31 years.

We have sat through decades of countless meetings of all shape and size in this regard, hosted by every possible government and non-government entity known who deals with water. We have heard innumerable reports on years of science findings from a multitude of researchers working on behalf of numerous business and government entities. It has been quite enlightening and has served as a reflection on how our actions regarding water affect the greater society often with winners and losers. One thing is clear after all these years of study, in order to achieve clean usable and societally acceptable water quality, we will have to store more water on the landscape and make our 1st, 2nd and 3rd order streams which feed our larger tributaries act more as they historically did before alterations on the landscape began. I believe this lawsuit challenge is based on the flawed genesis that 1918 was the beginning of time for this area of the state, that by allowing this project we will simply be putting things back to where they were and that this is not an "improvement" but merely a "maintenance" project. We cannot simply continue to gut and straighten out every little remaining semblance of nature attempting to heal itself in the name of removing more water and sending it downstream to others who don't want it all at once. We are simply exacerbating our very normal floods and droughts by continuing this unfettered and ill-advised type of action. It remains true that artificial drainage is necessary for our current choice in Agriculture production as well as our local economies abilities to sustain and thrive, However, we can no longer ignore the societal costs to our various adversely affected infrastructures downstream such as various costs to cities, rural roads, bridges, public utilities and losses to businesses such as recreation, tourism and other farming operations. We are not interlopers poking our noses into someone else's business, this is a state-wide issue. Members of this committee are aware of the need for water storage and together along with some of those members we have been developing potential legislation that will target water storage actions on the landscape. That could be very promising, it already has substantial support in the public landscape. If we put our collective heads together and in the future develop products and projects that will mimic natural water flow in our streams, it will in turn provide for stabilized flows, groundwater recharge and cleaner surface water in our lakes, streams and rivers. We intuitively know this as Minnesotan's who cherish our water resources.