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Natalie Hoidal '15 Organizes MNYEN Conference

Summary: Natalie Hoidal '15 is teaming up with the State of Minnesota Environmental Quality Board to organize the upcoming Minnesota Youth Environmental Network (MNYEN) conference.

(February 19, 2013)-Natalie Hoidal '15, Forest Lake, is teaming up with the State of Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB), Minnesota Youth Environmental Network (MNYEN), Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG), Youth Environmental Activists of Minnesota (YEAMN), and the Will Steger Foundation to organize the upcoming MNYEN conference. This conference answers Governor Mark Dayton's call for citizens' support in shaping a future that addresses Minnesota's environment and energy challenges.

At Governor Dayton's request, the state of Minnesota released an [environmental report card](#) and held [citizen forums](#) to discuss the results late last year. Findings from the forums will be presented on Friday, March 15, at an [environmental congress](#) in which citizen leaders will develop priorities to help guide the EQB and the Dayton Administration in creating short-term action steps and setting long-term goals for Minnesota's future.

Hoidal attended a citizen forum in Saint Cloud last December, where she and other Morris students were disappointed by the lack of youth representation—a trend that emerged in the other forums as well. As a result, the EQB and Ellen Anderson, senior adviser to the governor on energy and environment, are asking Minnesota's youth to hold its own environmental congress and present the findings at the general congress on March 15. Anderson has appointed Hoidal to help organize the congress.

“This conference is significant because our audience is made up of people who make change,” says Hoidal. “They’re blatantly asking for our opinion, which doesn’t happen very often. Obviously, it’s important that youth be present. It’s important to demonstrate that we are actually doing something and fight the stereotype that youth are just idealistic.”

Hoidal hopes that as many students as possible will attend the conference, noting, “the more people are involved, the stronger our voice will be at the general congress.” While she looks forward to being informed by the efforts of other groups in attendance, she also feels that she and other Morris students will bring a valuable point-of-view to the proceedings.

“Morris has its own perspective. While other groups are focused on legislation, Morris students have realistic solutions to larger problems because we’re working on those problems right where we are.”

The MNYEN conference will be held on Sunday, February 24, at the University of Minnesota Saint Paul Student Center. It will consist of an overview of the EQB report card as well as a series of breakout sessions illustrating different youth-led environmental movements in Minnesota—including one led by members of Morris's student organic garden. Participants will also be asked to take part in a [photo petition](#) and a [youth voice survey](#). Registration for the conference is available [online](#).

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