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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

UMACS campus sustainability conference at the University of Minnesota, Morris a success

Summary: Unrelated to the conference, a severed pipeline emphasized the “off the grid” nature of the Morris campus.

(October 17, 2011)-The Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability (UMACS) conference was held at the University of Minnesota, Morris campus September 23–24, 2011. The annual conference was a great success, drawing in a larger than expected crowd. Especially high in attendance were Morris students, staff, and faculty. Morris Sustainability Coordinator Troy Goodnough says he was especially pleased with the number of Morris folks who signed up for the event. Morris students and faculty from several areas of campus life presented their research at the conference.

With around 180 participants and more than 40 participating colleges, businesses, nonprofits, government, and community organizations, this was the largest UMACS conference ever hosted. Two tours were offered during the conference, a renewable energy tour and a local agriculture and healthy foods tour. The tours were conducted in collaboration with community partners. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) made outstanding contributions to the conference. NWF staff member Juliana Goodlaw-Morris serves on the UMACS steering committee, Senior Director Julian Keniry provided one of the keynote speeches, and National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Fellow Joseph Hartmann '12 worked on logistics for the event.

Alumnus Patrick Moore '83 of Clean Up the River Environment (CURE) gave the inspirational, final keynote speech, addressing mentorship. His keynote focused on creating change together and being open to learning, all of which is part of the “story of change.” He stressed his own path of mentorship and also that we must think about who we are mentoring to create this lasting change.

In a mishap unrelated to the conference, a natural gas pipeline was accidentally severed outside of Morris during the conference. While an unfortunate incident, it brought even greater attention to the reality that the sustainability conference was run “off the grid.” During the conference, heat and electricity were provided from the gasification plant and wind turbines respectively.

Goodnough would also like to offer his congratulations to the dining services staff, who managed to provide several entirely local foods dinners amid the natural gas service disruption. He says they showed “resilience and creativity and still managed to make great food” despite the obvious challenge. Overall, Goodnough says the whole weekend was a great success, a lot of fun, and he is looking forward to future UMACS get-togethers.

This conference was made possible through a collaborative effort between the UMACS steering committee, with representatives from Luther College the University of Wisconsin, River Falls Northland College Macalester College the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University and the National Wildlife Federation.

UMACS works to encourage the sharing of information and resources on campus sustainability, to encourage campuses to establish ongoing environmental audits and greenhouse gas inventories, and to break down barriers to collaboration between campuses and academic/professional staff/students at individual schools. Institutions of higher education are

major players in regional, state, and local economies, and are responsible for educating the next generation of leaders in government, business, and our communities. While many individual institutions have made significant advances toward sustainability in education and practice, we need more collective effort and coordination on this front in the Midwest. UMACS was established in 2005 to address this problem by encouraging networking, information sharing, cooperative research, and by hosting regular meetings to bring together academic and operations people from a variety of campuses as well as students active in sustainability on their campuses. UMACS is currently a volunteer operation. There is no paid staff or annual budget and they are governed by a volunteer steering committee.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.