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**MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF
2008 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE AWARDS**

*Recognition Given To Partnerships Between Business, Government and Nonprofit
Groups That Excel In Solving Complex Environmental Problems*

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, May 15, 2008 — The Minnesota Environmental Initiative (MEI) announced the winners of the 2008 Environmental Initiative Awards. These annual awards are given for outstanding partnerships between business, government and nonprofit groups in the categories: Energy and Climate Change, Environmental Education, Green Building and Development, Green Business and Environmental Management, and Natural Resource Protection and Restoration. One partnership also went home with the evening's top honor, the Partnership of the Year award.

"Tackling environmental issues through partnership is not easy," said MEI Executive Director, Mike Harley. "These winners have displayed remarkable resolve to put their individual agendas aside and work together to solve Minnesota's environmental problems."

The Partnership of The Year Award went to *Using Natural Resources Information in Local Planning*. This project was a concerted effort by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to help local units of government incorporate natural resource information when making land use planning and policy decisions. The project included the creation of conservation development roundtables, workshops, and a handbook, all designed to provide locally relevant examples. Twenty-two workshops were offered across the DNR's central region and attracted nearly 1,000 participants. Feedback from attendees confirmed that many wanted this kind of information and had not had access to it before. This groundbreaking effort by the DNR enabled the agency to respond to a wide variety of stakeholders and build new partnerships while encouraging sound environmental practices in local planning. The effort was made possible by the collaboration of many partners, including the Metropolitan Council, who helped with planning and announcing the workshops; the Urban Land Institute, who helped develop the content and format of the roundtables; and Brauer and Associates, who helped create the handbook.

The winners of the 2008 Environmental Initiative Awards are

Transportation Choices 2020 (Energy and Climate Protection) – Transportation 2020 was an initiative to fully fund a region-wide transit system in Minnesota. The initiative set out to secure the funding needed to offer Minnesotans an environmentally friendly alternative to driving. Accomplishing that required generating broad-based support from many sectors in the state. Many partners made that possible, including

members of the business community, supporters of proposed legislation in the Minnesota House and Senate, and over 20 endorsing organizations from the transit, environmental, labor, and faith-based communities. The result of this work was passage of a transportation bill this legislative session that provides a ¼ cent region-wide sales tax dedicated solely toward transit. This will generate approximately \$117 million per year for transit needs across the state.

Living Green Expo (Environmental Education) – The Living Green Expo is a free annual event that takes place every spring on the Minnesota State Fair grounds. It provides information and products to Minnesotans to help them reduce the environmental impact of their day-to-day living. Through its outreach, the Living Green Expo encourages markets for green products and inspires individuals to make green living choices. The first Living Green Expo in 2002 attracted 5,000 attendees, and in 2007, more than 22,000 attended. This successful and growing effort is a collaboration of government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses, coordinated by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. In addition, hundreds of exhibitors and volunteers make the Expo possible.

Fairview Office Park (Green Building and Development) – Fairview Office Park was an effort to demonstrate that a small rural business can build a conservation design office park that costs no more than a traditional development. Located in Baxter, Minnesota, the project encountered many barriers to environmentally friendly construction methods. As a result, the project managers wanted to not only succeed in their design, but also document the process so others could learn from their experience. A website was created that provided information for the general public, developers and contractors, and for local units of government. The website, combined with the office park's very visible location and other outreach, have caused a dramatic increase in interest in low-impact development. This effort was made possible through a task force of 34 community members from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. More than 32 agencies and organizations provided content for the project website.

Fibrominn Biomass Power Plant (Green Business and Environmental Management) – The Fibrominn Biomass Power Plant is the first of its kind in the U.S. – a renewable energy facility that generates power from poultry litter. This 55-megawatt power plant is designed to produce electricity by annually combusting more than 500,000 tons of poultry litter, a mixture of manure and bedding such as sawdust. Because poultry growers are concentrated near processing plants, they generate more litter than can be used as fertilizer on local fields. This litter accumulates in barns where it releases methane (a greenhouse gas), creates an odor nuisance, and can become a nonpoint source of water pollution. Combusting this litter helps make the poultry industry more sustainable and generates needed power. Partners in this project include Fibrowatt LLC, Swift County, the City of Benson, and regional poultry producers.

Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership (Natural Resource Protection and Restoration) – The Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership is an effort to reduce the fragmentation of Minnesota's largest concentration of privately-held forestland. Since 1999, over 400,000 acres of these forests have been parcelized into smaller tracts and sold – usually for development. The result is a fragmented forest less able to function as wildlife habitat and as a place for forestry or recreation. The Partnership uses conservation easements to keep these properties in private hands, on the tax rolls, and under sustainable management, yet preserved as healthy ecosystems. To date, the Partnership has already placed over 52,000 acres of forest into conservation easements in Itasca and southern Koochiching Counties. One of these projects is the largest working

forest easement in Minnesota's history. This effort has been possible through the collaboration of many partners, including the Blandin Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Trust for Public Lands, and numerous other private donors and advisors.

About the Minnesota Environmental Initiative

The Minnesota Environmental Initiative is a 16-year-old nonprofit organization that builds partnerships to develop collaborative solutions to Minnesota's environmental problems. The organization works with nonprofit, business and government partners to develop consensus on critical issues and move collectively toward positive environmental outcomes. MEI began the annual Environmental Initiative Awards program in 1994. Nominations are solicited, and a panel of independent judges selects the finalists and the ultimate winners of each category. The Partnership of the Year Award is selected by the MEI staff from among all the finalists.