



For immediate release

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**International Community Congress will bring together community teams
from U.S. and Canada to develop sustainable
economic development in Heart of the Continent region**

September 19, 2011 – The Heart of the Continent Partnership’s International Community Congress (Congress) has drawn a high level of interest, with twelve geographically diverse teams registered for the four-day event in October designed to brand the bi-national region, spur community economic development, and foster an appreciation for the area’s abundant natural resources. The teams are evenly distributed between Canada and the United States with five from Ontario, five from Minnesota, and two bi-national collaborations.

The teams are comprised of business leaders, elected officials, land managers, economic development officers, non-profit directors, interested citizens, and others. Participants share an interest in taking advantage of their community’s proximity to the vast wealth of natural, cultural, recreational and scenic assets of the region. The Heart of the Continent region includes 5.5 million acres (2.2 million hectares) of public lands spanning the Minnesota/Ontario border.

“We have had tremendous interest in the Congress,” said Doug Franchot, steering committee chair for the Heart of the Continent Partnership. “Community teams want to work on specific, creative projects to improve the economy of their towns and connect to their public lands.”

The *International Community Congress: Balancing Nature and Commerce in Communities that Neighbour Public Lands* will be held in Grand Portage, Minnesota and Thunder Bay, Ontario, from October 24 to 27, 2011. The Congress is being planned by a diverse team of local leaders and will be facilitated by a team from The Conservation Fund, a Virginia-based organization with long established experience in assisting communities in balancing nature and commerce and in forming critical partnerships. The Conservation Fund works with communities throughout the nation.

Sponsorship opportunities

The Congress has already received generous support from several foundations and other organizations. The funders have helped the initiative significantly towards the goal of \$150,000

for the Congress. Sponsorship opportunities still remain for organizations who want to play a role in this precedent-setting event.

The International Community Congress has already received support from the Blandin Foundation; University of Minnesota's Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership; Quetico Provincial Park, the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; Quetico-Superior Foundation, Kakabeka Falls Provincial Park Voyageurs National Park, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Organizations, businesses and people who are interested in sponsoring the Congress and supporting participation by community teams should contact Paul Danicic at 612-332-9630, or Bret Hesla at 612-333-1858 for more information.

For more information about the initiative, including a list of participating community teams, workshop purpose, goals and expected results, please visit www.heartofthecontinent.org.

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The Heart of the Continent Partnership is a Canadian/American coalition of land managers and local stakeholders working together on cross-border projects that promote the economic, cultural and natural health of the lakes, forests and communities on the Ontario/Minnesota border. From out of a broad collection of separate entities, the partnership is seeking to develop a common identity and sense of belonging to the larger cross-border area.