

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**May 6, 2020 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)**  
**Meeting conducted via Zoom**

**Present (in bold type): Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Earl DePass, Louisa Gagliardi, Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, Bill Kellner, Donna Lassiter, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenster, Steve Rappaport, Nina Romanoff, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Larry Trachtenberg, Debbie van Zyl, Kathleen Williamson.** Executive Director Anne Swaim was also present.

ABSENT: all present

Meeting started at 7:32 pm.

**President's Report— Valerie Lyle**

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Ken moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on March 2, 2020. Cary seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

A warm welcome was extended to new board member Suzanne Kavic.

All in-person SMRA events, including meetings, field trips, outdoor walks and public programs have been canceled through the end of May, including March and April events, under the New York Pause regulations in response to the coronavirus. Following discussion by the board of the picnic and board meeting scheduled for June 3, it was decided to cancel the picnic and hold the board meeting via zoom on June 10. The determination has not yet been made about whether to cancel other events scheduled for June.

**Development Committee Report— Valerie Lyle**

[Reference report: Membership and Donations as of April 30, 2020]

Membership numbers have been holding steady—as of April 30 total member households are 1,034 (518 are joint NAS/SMRA and 516 are SMRA chapter households). Donations year-to-date are good with \$12,919 received. Travel donations (\$2,300) are from the February trip to Cape Ann and the postponed Yellowstone trip which had been scheduled for this month.

The Executive Committee has approved the hiring of fundraising consultant Sharon Danosky. Ms. Danosky will help us with our annual appeal letter and other communications. Her fee for services performed through June is \$2,000. Also included is training for board members on best ways to approach telephone outreach to larger donors. The Development Committee will have an initial meeting with Ms. Danosky on May 7.

Ken pointed out that quotes for fundraising assistance were submitted by two consultants. The Development Committee felt that Sharon Danosky's quote represented the best value and match for the services of interest to SMRA. Ken discussed a possible email outreach series that would include photographs by some of SMRA's outstanding photographers. Help with an email campaign will be provided by Ms. Danosky.

Our annual appeal letter mailing is scheduled for early June. Anne and Ellen will work with Sharon Danosky on finalizing the letter and mailing strategies. Board members were reminded that the deadline to return updated PS packets has passed.

Larry suggested that we should consider placing lockboxes for donations at our sanctuaries. Ken supported this idea. Val pointed out that we are considering adding QR codes that will link to our website, which has a clickable donation icon.

**Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

[Reference reports: Investment and Asset Allocation Mix April 1, 2020 *and* Investment Portfolio Performance for Period Ending March 31, 2020]

For our official quarterly report, as of April 1, 2020 the portfolio balance was \$980,556, a \$48,131 (4.7%) decrease below the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687. The \$100,000 Ed Mertz bequest was received in late March; without that bequest the balance would have been about \$880,000 representing a \$148,000 (14.4%) decline for the year.

**Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger cont'd**

Markets rebounded in April and the portfolio balance on May 1<sup>st</sup> was \$1,050,994, a gain of \$22,307 (2.2%) for the year and 7.2% for the month of April. At the end of the first quarter the year-to-date, one year and three-year investment rates of return were -14.3%, -6.2% and 2.7% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of -12.8%, -6.5% and 0.8% for the same periods. As of May 1, 2020, we are \$113,797 (185.6%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. However, that includes about \$67,000 in Mertz bequest funds that have not yet been invested but will likely be invested over the coming months. Excluding that \$67,000, we are \$47,130 (35.5%) above the guideline. There have been \$100,000 (the Mertz bequest) in additions to and \$8,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio during 2020.

**Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney**

[Reference report: Operating Revenues and Expenses for 4 Months Ended April 30, 2020]

Revenues year-to-date are about \$25,000 which is about \$2,000 below budgeted revenues. Donations are about \$1,200 below budget. Seed sale revenues were strong in April, probably due to the cool spring weather and the coronavirus stay home order. Education programs are on budget so far in 2020 but spring program cancellations will result in reduced revenues that will be reflected in future reports. We expect to lose between \$3,000 and \$5,000 in revenues without factoring in the postponed South Africa trip and potential cancellation of fall education programs.

Six of the people who reserved spaces for the trip to Yellowstone National Park that had been scheduled for this month have requested refunds; three of these people have allowed SMRA to retain the part of their deposits designated as donations. The remaining Yellowstone travelers have instructed SMRA to keep their entire deposits for the trip, with the expectation that the trip will be rescheduled for 2021. At this point, the Yellowstone trip is \$3,000 cash positive.

Expenses year-to-date are on budget at approximately \$44,000.

**Fund Raising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi**

Our July pontoon boat ride at the Meadowlands has been canceled but the October Birdathon is still on, although some modifications may be required. The summer fundraising dinner at Crabtree's Kittle House under the restaurant's "Sparkle" program for local charities is indefinitely postponed.

Val reminded the board that our Annual Dinner has been rescheduled for August 23, although whether the dinner can take place is uncertain. If we cancel, people who have signed up will be offered a refund. Tom M. pointed out that we've made a \$1,000 deposit to the restaurant (Crabtree's Kittle House) for the dinner and have received about \$2,000 in revenue so far. Anne suggested that a final decision on how to proceed should be made at the June board meeting.

Cary mentioned that the Birding Tea fundraiser has been postponed. She would still like to host it if we are able to reschedule.

Kathleen said we should consider doing virtual fundraising. A local non-profit, Neighbors Link, had a virtual gala that was very successful.

**Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenstern**

No contact pickup for bird seed sales is working well, according to Anne.

We need to think about our fall seed sale weekend. Debbie suggested we do a fall sale with mandatory pre-payment; SMRA volunteers would place purchases in cars to maintain social distancing. Anne will consult with the Town of New Castle about whether SMRA will be allowed to use the Town Hall parking lot this fall.

Phil suggested we consider a sale now to clear our current inventory of seed. Anne estimated that the shed is 25% full. Ken suggested we offer seed at a 25% price reduction. The sale price will be effective May 15.

**Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim**

SMRA's virtual Bird Chats are being held every Monday evening. The Bird Chats have been highly successful. They are expanding our outreach as we have participants from other chapters as well as some who are not affiliated with an Audubon chapter.

Eight of those who signed up for our postponed Yellowstone trip have expressed interest in to going in 2021 if the trip is rescheduled. We've also had one new signup for a 2021 trip to Yellowstone (see also Treasurer's Report, above).

Our South Africa trip scheduled for the fall of 2020 will not take place. Debbie is working on the logistics of rescheduling for the fall of 2021.

Sanctuary visitation has increased dramatically during this spring's pandemic "pause," probably by a factor of four. This is especially noticeable on days when the weather is nice.

NYS Parks has agreed to fund virtual field trips to substitute for the now-cancelled SMRA-led field trips under the NYS Connect Kids to Parks program. Eric Stone and SMRA environmental educator Pat Mutolo are willing to conduct virtual programs, possibly this spring although a fall schedule is more likely. We have interest from Grafflin School in Chappaqua and may be able to do pilot virtual field trips this spring.

The Pruyn Sanctuary map is now live on the Avenza PDF Maps app. Maps of Brinton Brook and Graff Sanctuaries should be available on the app by the end of May, with additional sanctuary maps to follow after that. Board members are requested to download the maps and field check for accuracy when they visit the sanctuaries.

Cary raised the issue of instituting a charge for bird walks. Anne noted that a Bird Chat participant has requested a guided bird walk and will make a donation.

Our online Warbler Workshop is scheduled for May 8 and has 34 signups. There are a couple of slots left. Charge is \$15.

**Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth**

The Advocacy Committee has not met but will try to schedule a Zoom meeting.

The Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H) will participate in the Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation Initiative with other Regional Conservation Partnerships. The goal is to improve bird habitat in New England and New York. It is hoped that the initiative will receive a substantial grant from the federal government. SMRA will support this effort by H2H.

The Audubon NY chapter roundtable took place virtually earlier today. Val, Richard, Tom R, and Anne participated. Each chapter gave a three-minute presentation on current projects and effects of the pandemic. Several chapters, including SMRA, are conducting virtual programs. Richard pointed out that the next New York-Connecticut Audubon Council meeting is scheduled for late October at Southbury, CT.

**Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.**

Michael has received over 1,000 seedling trees & shrubs from NYS DEC and is working on a planting schedule for the SMRA sanctuaries. We have also received "buffer in a bag" trees for Brinton and Choate sanctuaries. In addition to these, Michael has purchased 100 more trees.

Richard Mauser is interested in donating another bench for one of our sanctuaries.

Michael would like to harvest ramps in one of our sanctuaries. Please let him know if you are interested in joining him.

Phil described two successful sanctuary work projects. On March 22 Rudy Fasciani, Michael, David Watson and Phil spread wood chips to ameliorate a wet condition on one of the trails in Choate. On April 28 Rob Newborn, Mike, David Watson, and Phil installed a 70-foot puncheon to cover a muddy area on one of the trails in Pruyn.

**Pruyn Garden Report—Donna Lassiter**

We have four garden volunteers including Val and Donna who work on Tuesday mornings. Social distancing guidelines are being followed when working in the garden. We will not be buying new plants this year; the goal is to maintain the garden in a healthy state. Phil and Ken suggested we consider doing a virtual garden tour. Val described Eric Stone's online video post of a walk through the Crawbuckie Preserve in Ossining.

A detailed document listing of arboretum plantings will be posted to the website.

**Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl**

The possibility of conducting bird walks was discussed in anticipation of modification or lifting of the NY Pause stay-at-home order. There would be a maximum of ten people, including the walk leader. We would limit the number of walks to two or three per week. They would take place in local birding hotspots. An initial test with a smaller number of participants would be used to evaluate whether maintaining social distancing guidelines is feasible on a bird walk. Ginger said the test should be conducted with three people on the initial walk and that the risk-reward ratio should be weighed. Steve said locations need to be chosen carefully; sites with open areas make viewing birds with six feet of separation possible while wooded areas are more problematic. Anne said we may not try restarting bird walks until summer. Suzanne suggested reaching out to our membership to gauge interest in restarting bird walks. She also suggested asking walk participants to make a donation.

**Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson**

We had a successful virtual book club meeting to discuss Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*. On June 2 we will discuss the *Feather Thief*, also virtually. We are considering adding a summer book club session (book TBD).

**Newsletter—Anne Swaim**

The issue deadline is May 11. As our in-person events are cancelled we need content!

**Adjournment—Valerie Lyle**

Kathleen moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Tom R. seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 9:10.