

Saw Mill River Audubon
July 13, 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: Ken, Nina

Meeting started at 7:02 pm.

President's Report—Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Tom R. moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on June 10, 2020 with one amendment to correct the dates of the upcoming SMRA Birdathon (Birdathon to be held Oct. 9–11, 2020). Steve seconded this motion. The motion approving the amended minutes was adopted unanimously.

Covid update: SMRA's office in Pruyn Sanctuary will remain closed at least through August. Visits are allowed by appointment only. Please see the SMRA website for procedures that must be followed by all visitors. Note that an online health questionnaire needs to be filled out before coming to the office. In addition, visitors must sign the visitor log with date and time of entry and exit from the office.

Membership Report [Reference Membership and Donation Report as of July 11, 2020]

The number of joint NAS/SMRA member households is somewhat inflated as SMRA delayed removing expired memberships until after the fund drive. Office Manager Ellen Heidelberger will be deleting lapsed joint member households from the SMRA database this month. The current membership household number is 1,075 (536 joint and 539 SMRA chapter members).

The annual fund drive is off to a very good start. Of the monies received, approximately \$22,000 will qualify for a matching grant by an anonymous donor. Our policy is to make a personal thank you phone call to all donors who give \$100 or more. All donors receive a written thank you letter from SMRA. Board members making calls to these donors report that it has been a positive experience with good conversations.

Our in-person Annual Dinner has been canceled. Our deposit with Crabtree's Kittle House has been used to reserve a date for the 2021 Annual Dinner (Sunday, April, 11, 2021.)

We are now planning a virtual annual meeting later this year (Oct. 18, 2020) with keynote talk by David Ringer, Chief Network Officer for National Audubon, quilt raffle, and presentation by scholarship winners. On July 29 we will hold a second meeting on Zoom to plan for this event. We are considering the option of Kittle House providing an appetizer delivery option.

We have a 2020 Larry Light Scholarship recipient: Adam Vinson of New York City. He will attend the Young Birders Virtual Hog Island Audubon Camp. Adam, who will be beginning his senior year in high school, is an active young birder. He is president of the New York State Young Birders Club.

We've received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan of approximately \$16,000. We will apply to have the loan forgiven under the terms of the PPP; the expectation is that it will not have to be paid back. See Treasurer's Report, below, for additional details.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

Work under the contract with our fundraising consultant has been completed. The annual fund drive letter written with the help of the consultant was well-received with a lot of positive feedback. Calls to donors of higher amounts have gone well. SMRA's treasurer reported that fund drive receipts to date are approximately \$40,000. This compares favorably to last year when \$28,600 had been received through the end of July. The \$40,000 figure does not include an additional \$22,000 in matching funds to be received. See Treasurer's Report, below, for additional details.

Several board members expressed appreciation to Ellen and Anne for preparing and distributing the fund-raising packets to board members for PSing and mailing. The letter, printed with color photos this year, had a polished look and instructions to board members were clear, making the fund drive an efficient and seamless operation. It was noted that Ellen received assistance with fund drive prep from Phil.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of July 1, 2020, the portfolio balance was \$1,089,918, a \$61,231 (6.0%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687. As of July 1, 2020, we are \$66,782 (50.2%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. This figure excludes about \$67,000 in cash from the Mertz bequest that will be invested in the market over time. There have been \$100,000 in additions to and \$13,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2020.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Reference report: Operating Revenues and Expenses for 6 months ended June 30, 2020]

Financial Report: Operating revenues for the first six months are about \$2,700 below expectations due primarily to reduced education program revenues (\$2,850) and lower quilt raffle sales (\$2,000), which were offset in part by higher annual fund donations.

Operating expenses for the first six months are \$3,000 lower than expected due primarily to lower garden expenses (\$750) and lower advocacy expenses (\$1,000). The operating deficit for the first six months is about equal to expectations.

\$13,000 was withdrawn from the endowment and transferred to the checking account to cover the operating deficit. In addition, there were about \$26,000 of unbudgeted revenues consisting primarily of the PPP Loan (\$16,237), Yellowstone 2021 trip deposits (\$6,000) and Larry Light donations (\$2,400).

Unbudgeted expenses were about \$13,000, consisting primarily of South Africa expenses (\$6,750), the Brinton spillway repair (\$3,000) and the fundraising consultant (\$2,000). Primarily due to the PPP Loan, the checking account balance increased by about \$9,800 since the beginning of the year.

Annual Fund: The Annual Fund is doing very well this year. As of June 30th, the annual fund receipts were approximately \$25,500. So far in July, there have been an additional \$14,500 in donations for a total of about \$40,000. Last year, the annual fund had received \$28,600 through July 31. So, as of today, the annual fund this year is about \$11,400, or about 40%, better than last year. Checks are still coming in every day so the annual fund this year will clearly be more than 50% better than last year. More complete numbers will be available at the end of July, but it is clear that the matching grant program and everyone's efforts made a big difference this year.

PPP Loan: As Val mentioned, SMRA received a PPP Loan in the amount of \$16,237 on June 24th. This was put in a separate SMRA checking account that will be used to pay qualifying PPP expenses such as payroll, state and federal payroll taxes and retirement contributions. SMRA has 24 weeks to dispense these funds but I estimate we will use all the funds in about 12 weeks or by the end of September.

Fund Raising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi

We are working on producing a fundraising calendar with bird photos contributed by our top photographers. The calendar will also have information about SMRA and promote donations. The print run will probably be 100 at which level the cost per piece is \$6 to produce. The sale price is anticipated to be in the range of \$10–\$15. Mailing and fulfillment is being worked out. We are looking to have online ordering.

Kathleen asked about the program under which SMRA-branded merchandise is available for sale on the [zazzle.com](https://www.zazzle.com) website. Tom M. stated that year-to-date revenue is \$151.

Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim

We are still receiving seed sale orders; sale pricing continues at 50% off, and the storage shed is slowly emptying. We are looking for a Seed Sale Committee co-chair to help with promotion of the seed sale.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

This has been a summer like no other. The annual fund drive has been a big effort by Ellen (with help from Phil.) Virtual events such as our regular Bird Chats, have been well-attended. Small Group Birding has been going well with a maximum of six participants. Via Phil's connection with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and with input from Anne, information on birding hotspots is being added to the Trail Conference's highly-regarded trail maps.

Tom Burke and Gail Benson, leading NYS birders who live in Rye, have reported that landscape work at the John Jay Heritage Center (JHC) in Rye is impacting critical bird habitat at the JHC and at the adjacent Marshlands Conservancy. JHC manages 20+ acres jointly owned by Westchester County and New York State Parks. It appears that the terms of this management agreement are being violated by unauthorized removal of over 100 trees, improper excavation in a wetland area and building a fence through an important wildlife corridor. As key stakeholders of Marshlands Conservancy, an Important Bird Area, Westchester Audubon chapters and Friends of Marshlands Conservancy are requesting the opportunity to review and comment on current and future landscape actions by the Jay Heritage Center.

SMRA and our sister Westchester Audubon chapters want to see New York State and Westchester County hold JHC accountable with stricter oversight and enforcement of the terms of the management agreement, which is up for renewal. We are considering various actions, including sending an Action Alert to all Audubon members in the County and alerting elected officials, including the Westchester County Executive.

Audubon New York is also helping with this issue.

Larry pointed out that the Marshlands Conservancy has more bird species than any other place in Westchester with a tally of around 260. Larry went on to raise the possibility that legal action may be required to obtain a court order to stop the illegal construction should the JHC fail to stop the work in question and restore the property to the condition required in the management agreement.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

SMRA is partnering with the group Croton 100 to work on climate change-related actions. Several committee members participated in Croton 100's webinar on calculating your household carbon footprint. Board members are encouraged to visit the Croton 100 website and follow the instructions on determining household carbon footprints and what choices can be made to be more carbon neutral.

We are working on a Food Use webinar series. The first program, A Birdseye View of Food, has been scheduled for late September with discussion of local agriculture and its impact on the environment, including bird habitat. The second webinar will cover the environmental effects of how we consume food and how choices about what we eat have an impact—for example, a plant-based diet vs high levels of meat consumption. Lastly, we'll tackle how waste in food production and consumption is a significant component of greenhouse gas production.

Kathleen suggested a tie-in with Films on Purpose to show a film on this topic. Cary suggested the film *Dirt*, which has been shown at the Croton Free Library.

Advocacy Committee Report Cont'd—Richard Saravay

Richard pointed out that the Advocacy Committee is currently reviewing the draft of the 2020 Audubon NY Council of Chapters advocacy resolutions, which SMRA needs to approve and, possibly, suggest changes. Board members who are not on the Committee are welcome to view the draft and provide input.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

Two of the three Buffer in a Bag plantings have been completed (at Brinton and Graff Sanctuaries). The final planting will be done at Choate Sanctuary. To facilitate social distancing, the Pinecliff Sanctuary boardwalk is now one-way.

The bench donated by Richard Masur to honor volunteer Rudy Fasciani has been installed at Brinton Brook Sanctuary. A dedication ceremony was held with Rudy and Richard in attendance and pictures of this event were shown via Zoom.

Brinton neighbor Gerry Weinstein has expressed an interest in improving the Brinton Pond. He has offered to pay for needed repairs to the dam. The board should discuss this at a future meeting.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Debbie participated in the recent New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) board meeting. SMRA's commitment to host the 2021 NYSOA annual meeting has been altered by the pandemic. Debbie proposed to NYSOA that SMRA host the 2023 annual meeting instead. This was positively received. Comments by SMRA board members were supportive, as well.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

The Nature Book Club will meet Sept. 29 to discuss *Lazy Point* by Carl Safina.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The issue deadline for the fall newsletter is the first week of August. Board members are urged to submit content.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Bill moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Louisa seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:19.