

Saw Mill River Audubon
January 11, 2021 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: Nina

Meeting started at 7:03 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 December 7, 2020. Suzanne seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

All board members need to return the Conflict of Interest form that was sent out. Per Ellen's instructions, "Conflict of Interest Policy Exhibit B to be completed, signed, and returned to office by drop-off, email, mail or fax (914-666-7430)."

Bill will chair the Nominating Committee again this year. Steve Rappaport and John Cavallero will also serve on the Committee. The Committee will nominate candidates for the board of directors class of 2024 (3-year terms), board officers (1-year terms), and members of the Audit and Finance Committees (1-year terms). The Committee will also seek to nominate candidates who will fill the two vacancies in the board class of 2022.

The Annual Dinner, scheduled for April, will, in all likelihood, have to be postponed again because of the ongoing pandemic. The board debated rescheduling at Crabtree's Kittle House later in the year. The consensus of the board was to try to schedule a date in October, 2021 at the restaurant. A regular board meeting, to be held via Zoom, will be scheduled for April 5th. Bill asked about the June picnic. Anne suggested reserving Senasqua Park in advance for the event. The board will review plans for the picnic at its March meeting.

With the probable postponement of the April Annual Dinner, we're looking at having a Zoom public program during that month. Anne is exploring the possibility of a program with David McIntyre, a former SMRA board member who relocated from Westchester to Southern California, with a focus on birdlife in that region.

Anne showed the beautiful quilt, *Owl de Lune*, that Jean made for the 2021 Birding Quilt Raffle.

The board discussed how to utilize the Ed Mertz bequest to support young people's environmental education as Ed had directed. The Executive Committee previously voted to expend \$250 from the bequest to fund a speaker for a NYS Young Birders program. Another possible use of the bequest, which Anne is looking into, is funding a program where older young birders would lead birding walks for their more junior young birder colleagues. A small stipend to the walk leaders would serve to encourage their ongoing involvement with birding and environmental education. Although the pandemic may create some issues, we're looking at summer 2021 for this program. Val proposed that the bequest be used to fund SMRA sponsorship of family walks for parents with younger children. These walks would be led by the SMRA educators.

Board members were asked to submit additional ideas for the Mertz bequest and send them to the SMRA office. Phil suggested that income from the bequest could also be used to fund or extend some of our current education programs. Richard proposed forming a committee to come up with ideas and present them to a future board meeting. Phil, Earl, and Suzanne expressed interest in joining this new committee.

Development Committee Report

The 2021 annual fund drive mailing date will be in mid-May. Instead of having an in-person PS party, we are looking to distribute PS materials to board members in the same manner instituted for the 2020 drive. We plan to hire our fundraising consultant, Sharon Danosky, to help draft this year's fund drive letter and to assist with strategies for donor outreach as she did for the 2020 drive.

Membership Report [Reference Membership and Donation Report as of Dec. 31, 2020]

Total member households are at 1,041, with 451 joint NAS/SMRA member households and 590 SMRA chapter member households.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of January 1, 2021, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,304,783, a \$276,096 (26.8%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687 and a \$38,886 (3.1%) increase for the month of December. There were \$150,047 in additions to and \$23,995 in withdrawals from the portfolio during 2020. This includes \$9,720 in a matching grant from our anonymous donor which was received in late December for increased contributions made during the second part of the year. As of January 1, 2021, we are \$76,353 (57.9%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Larry asked about asset allocation in the time of the pandemic. Phil replied that the SMRA portfolio is about 60% equities and 40% cash and bonds. Larry expressed concerns about the sustainability of the stock market in light of the economic distress caused by the pandemic and political unrest. Ken expressed confidence in the Finance Committee and noted that it has resisted trying to time the market. Richard reminded the board that we carry two years of operating expenses in cash. Phil affirmed Richards's comment and added that this policy reduces the chance of being forced to sell equity positions in a declining market. Larry was invited to attend the next Finance Committee meeting if he wished to do so.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney [Reference report: SMRA 2020 Operating Revenue and Expenses]

Tom referred to his handout that Anne put up on the shared screen. 2020 Operating Revenues were approximately \$19,500 over budget, primarily due to significantly higher donations. Donations were higher due primarily to increased annual fund donations (+\$15,600), matching grants (+\$4,800) and one-time gifts (+\$4,400), offset in part by lower trip donations (-\$4,000). In addition, seed sale revenue was about \$3,000 over budget and education revenue was \$4,000 less than budget.

Total 2020 operating expenses were about \$5,500 better than budget. Salaries and benefits were about \$1,200 over budget due primarily to increased hours worked by Ellen during 2020. Sanctuaries expenses were about \$1,700 over budget, due primarily to the printing of maps and additional work by Danny during 2020. Arboretum and garden expenses were about \$1,350 under budget and withdrawals from the garden endowment were \$750 under budget, both due to fewer plant purchases as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Advocacy expenses were \$2,500 under budget because the two Audubon Council meetings in 2020 were held virtually.

As a result, the net operating deficit of about \$41,400 was approximately \$25,000 better than budget. Withdrawals from the endowment of \$23,000 plus available cash from the SMRA checking account of \$17,400 were used to fund the deficit. Anne then put page two of Tom's handout up on the shared screen which showed unbudgeted expenses of about \$20,500, consisting primarily of Pruy House repairs of about \$10,000. Unbudgeted revenues were about \$21,500, consisting primarily of the \$16,237 PPP Loan.

Fundraising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi

All SMRA 2021 calendars have been sold with a net profit of \$985. Several board members commended Louisa on the success of this new fundraising effort and the quality of the product. Louisa is looking forward to working on the 2022 calendar.

Pruyn House—Ginger Bernardin

The painting job has been completed at a cost of \$5,175. The contractor we used did an excellent job. Rik also did some needed electrical work, including fixing the breezeway ceiling light. Anne commented that the completed work is much appreciated. Danny has fixed the problem gutter. Board members expressed their thanks to Ginger for her efforts to coordinate Pruy House improvements.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novensterm

We had a good third Saturday seed sale in December. We have an upcoming sale scheduled for January 16. Volunteers are needed to assist with the sale.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

New York Audubon chapters submitted comments on the proposed NYS DEC update to its deer management plan; SMRA has signed on to these comments. While changes to firearms hunting regulations don't affect Westchester County, increased taking of deer in the bow hunting season is applicable to Westchester sites with deer management plans. The state is finally considering the impact of deer populations on forest health. This is a welcome change. An area where the DEC is dragging its feet is the use of lead ammunition. Lead gets into the food chain when eagles and other animals consume lead shot in deer carcasses. The results can be fatal. The letter advocates for data collection on use of lead vs non-lead ammo to develop data on the scope of the problem.

Anne has created Zoom programs for several public libraries in the area; eight are currently booked. Where these programs take place in the territories of other Audubon chapters, local chapter information will be displayed. Anne wrote to the other four Westchester County Audubon chapters to alert them to the requested Zoom programs being held in their membership areas, noting above. We also offered to promote other chapters' events on our Zoom Bird Chats. Anne will also do her virtual raptors program for EagleFest which is a week-long series of virtual events this year.

Some of those signed up for the May Yellowstone trip have suggested that participation be limited to recipients of the Covid-19 vaccine. Anne said we propose a SMRA policy that any participants on overnight SMRA trips must have a COVID vaccine. Suzanne expressed the opinion that this would be a sensible policy. It is also possible that we will, once again, have to postpone the mid-May Yellowstone trip, possibly to Fall 2021 and even also shift the South Africa trip to 2022. We are closely monitoring conditions at both locations.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

SMRA's Bird's Eye View of Food Webinar no. 2 on the impact of our food choices will be held on January 27th. We plan to show a short video, "The Diet That Helps Fight Climate Change," followed by a talk by one of the film makers and Q&A. The author Carl Safina has been approached by Ken. Dr. Safina may be able to join our panel for this or a future webinar.

On Thursday, Jan. 14, we are co-hosting a webinar with the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County and Teatown's Environmental Leadership Learning Alliance to present an overview of issues related to the siting of solar projects in our area. There are over 80 registrations so far. Board members are urged to sign up.

Richard informed the board that Audubon NY is looking for a bird conservationist to coordinate work on Long Island. Check the Audubon NY website for job qualifications and other details.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

The Nature Book Club will meet on Jan. 19 to discuss Michael McCarthy's *The Moth Snowstorm*. After that, we'll read *Vesper Flights* by Helen Macdonald for our next meeting, which is scheduled for March 16.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

The SMRA deer management program for 2020 has ended as of December 31 with only one more deer taken since the December 7 report, giving a total of eight for the season.

Some boundary marking work has been done in our Pruyn Sanctuary with Michael Madias walking with Pruyn neighbors David Watson and Rob Newborn.

Michael and Rudy were joined by two other walkers for the January second Saturday walk at Brinton Brook Sanctuary.

Brinton Brook neighbor Gerry Weinstein reports illegal tree cutting on his property by an adjacent landowner. Anne noted that the Weinstein property caretaker has complained about the activities of the Forest Preschool, although it appears that these complaints are not shared by the Weinstains and are more about his desire not to have as much activity at Brinton Brook. Anne noted that the Forest Preschool has followed agreed guidelines for using the Brinton Brook Sanctuary.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

On Jan. 21 we will host a Zoom program with author Susan Fox Rogers to discuss her latest work, *When Birds are Near: Dispatches from Contemporary Writers*. February's Zoom program will feature birding guide Joan Collins who will discuss birding the Adirondacks. The date is Feb. 18.

If you have ideas for programs, please let Debbie know. Ken suggested considering a Zoom program with falconer James Eyring.

SMRA's Small Group Birding walks will continue. Participants are required to follow Covid-19 guidelines; there is a maximum of 10 participants.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the spring issue is Feb 1. This issue covers Mar., Apr., and May. Richard will do an article on our webinars. Other submissions are requested.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Ken made a motion to adjourn and Cary seconded. With all present voting in favor, Val adjourned the meeting at 8:36 pm.