

Saw Mill River Audubon
February 1, 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 Romanoff

Meeting started at 7:01 pm.

President's Report—Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Suzanne moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on January 11, 2020. Ginger seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee will be chaired again by Bill this year. The revised bylaws allow two board members to serve on this committee. Steve has agreed to join. Our non-board member is John Cavallero. We have two board vacancies to fill this year. They are from the class of 2022. The terms of board members who are elected to fill the vacancies in this class will end on March 31, 2022. Please contact one of the Nominating Committee members if you have any suggestions for possible board candidates.

Membership Report [Reference Membership and Donation Report as of Jan. 29, 2021]

Total of member households is 1,061, with 468 joint NAS/SMRA member households and 593 SMRA chapter member households.

Donations received so far in 2021 are at \$2,070. Tom noted that his financial report shows 2021 donations at about \$5,000. That is because donation checks and credit card donations dated in late December but not deposited until 2021 are treated as 2020 donations in the Membership Report and as 2021 donations in the financial report

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

In response to SMRA's request to Sharon Danosky for a proposal to assist with the 2021 Fund Drive, we received a proposal with six action items for which the charge would be \$3,000. We asked Sharon to revise the proposal to reduce the cost. Sharon agreed to do five of the items on this list for a charge of \$2,000, which is \$500 above the amount budgeted by the board. Like last year, Sharon will conduct a training session for board members on making calls to potential donors; this year all board members will be encouraged to attend.

Ken moved that the board of directors approve adding \$500 to the original \$1,500 budgeted for our fundraising consultant. Suzanne seconded this motion. The motion was approved with all board members voting in the affirmative.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

[Reference Investment Portfolio Performance Report for Period Ending December 31, 2020]

For our official quarterly report, as of January 1, 2021, the portfolio balance was \$1,304,783, a \$276,096 (26.8%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687 and a \$121,599 (10.3%) increase for the fourth quarter. At the end of year, the one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were 13.5%, 9.1% and 9.7% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 9.5%, 6.1% and 7.2% for the same periods. There were \$150,047 in additions to and \$23,995 in withdrawals from the portfolio during 2020. The balance as of February 1, 2020 was \$1,292,117 a \$12,666 (1.0%) decrease for the year which includes the effect of a \$9,000 withdrawal in January. As of February 1, 2021, we are \$106,360 (80.7%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Mertz Bequest—Phil Heidelberg

The special committee created to assess how to implement the \$100,000 bequest from Ed Mertz has met and come up with the following possibilities on best uses of the bequest that conform to the wishes of the Mertz family.

Background

*\$100,000 bequest in March 2020

*Desire to support youth education

*Underserved kids if possible

*Not binding

*Can assume up to \$5,000/year in income to fund program

*Probably not wise to fund \$5,000 in new programs

*Consider two possibilities:

1. Use grant to pay for Anne's existing youth outreach programs, estimated at 5–10% of her time, no additional cost over current budget
2. Fund two new programs with estimated cost of about \$1,200–\$2,000 per year depending on how many outings.

Potential New Programs**1. Young Family Nature Exploration Programs with focus on Hudson River**

*For now, small, masked group (12) walks led by educator

*For children ages 4-12, accompanied by parent or other caretaker (included in participant count)

*Target Peekskill, Verplanck, and Ossining through local libraries

*Some programs with Spanish interpreter (hopefully Brian Kluepfel & wife Paula)

*Use SMRA library Lunetta Explorer Bags to demo contents and promote use

* \$40/hour x 3 hours = \$120 per two-hour outing (includes prep & travel)

* ~ \$800 for six outings (May – October) including some prep time

*Possible nominal charge of \$5 per family group to discourage no-shows

2. Young Birder Walks, led by a young birder (teen or someone like Kyle Bardwell)

*Six walks—once a month from May to October

*For youth ages 8 - 16, accompanied by adult

* \$20/hour x 3 hours = \$60/walk

* ~\$400 total, including some mentoring time

\$1,200 total could grow with increased number of outings or if staff used (Social Security, etc. costs)

Richard asked if we should we expand the area served to Tarrytown. Anne replied that the program under discussion is a pilot project to be implemented this calendar year. We could consider expansion to new areas in 2022 based on evaluation of the pilot project.

Ken asked if any of these programs could be conducted in the Brinton Brook Sanctuary, possibly in conjunction with the Second Saturday Walks. Anne responded that the pilot project under consideration is a different kind of nature walk with a different audience than the typical outing in Brinton Brook.

Tom M. explained that these new programs for youth outreach will be shown as off-budget items. Tom. M moved that the board of directors approve up to \$2,000 for new programs in 2021 related to youth outreach. Suzanne provided a second for this motion. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

Tom reported that operating revenues for January were about \$8,400 consisting primarily of \$5,000 in donations and \$2,500 of bird seed sales. Operating expenses for January were about \$14,400 consisting primarily of \$7,800 of salaries and benefits and \$2,500 of bird seed purchases. \$9,000 was withdrawn from the endowment and the checking account balance increased from \$6,400 at year-end to \$9,400 on January 31st.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney cont'd

Tom then reported that at its meeting on January 25th, the Finance Committee discussed withdrawing up to \$1,850 from the Garden Endowment during 2021 for maintenance and improvements to the Butterfly Garden at Pruyn Sanctuary. The Board needs to approve this withdrawal, which complies with the 5% guideline.

Pruyn House Planting Proposal—Donna Lassiter

Improvements are needed to the plantings immediately adjacent to Pruyn House. We are looking to plant 20 flats of 32 plants each in the side garden to the right of the house. The cost is estimated to be \$960. We are also looking to plant native shrubs in the front (driveway) side of the house with the cost estimated at \$1,285. These plantings represent a much-needed upgrade to the look of our organization's headquarters and will further our mission by demonstrating the importance of planting native species.

Val mentioned that, depending on timing, work on Pruyn House may interfere with these plans. Donna replied that the optimum time to do the planting would be in the fall of 2021. Larry asked why the Board needed to approve relatively small Garden Endowment withdrawals. In response to this question, Tom explained that the Garden fund and the Larry Light Scholarship Fund were donor restricted funds subject to special restrictions under New York State law. For example, withdrawals in excess of 7% in any year are considered imprudent and must be specifically justified as reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances. As a result, SMRA has historically asked the Board to approve the amount of the annual withdrawal from the Garden fund and to approve each scholarship granted from the Larry Light fund.

Richard moved that the board of directors approve up to \$2,500 as an off-budget item for plantings in the front of Pruyn House and in the garden to the right of the house. Debbie seconded this motion. All board members present voted in the affirmative to approve the motion. Note that this expenditure is not part of the Pruyn House or Garden & Arboretum budgets, but future maintenance of these new plantings will be part of the Garden & Arboretum budget starting in 2022.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

We need three additional volunteers to assist with February's third Saturday seed sale. The recent snowstorm and projected cold snap should increase the demand for seed. Earl, Steve and Richard agreed to join Michael in covering the sale.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

SMRA has received a National Audubon collaborative grant of \$1000 for six bilingual directional signs and ten "discovery" location signs for the Pruyn Sanctuary. The discovery trail idea is intended to engaged families with children and we will offer laminated bird guides as an incentive to those who complete the discovery trail. We anticipate an April 2021 launch date for this project. Board members are encouraged to participate by helping with the design and proofreading of the signs and guide.

Tomorrow night Anne will give her program on raptors as part of this year's virtual EagleFest.

As described in the minutes of the January 2021 board meeting, Anne has created Zoom programs for several public libraries and other organizations in the area. (See addendum appended to these minutes for a list of upcoming programs.) Where these programs take place in the territories of other Audubon chapters, local chapter information will be displayed as part of our ongoing commitment to support the work of our fellow Audubon chapters. We will also continue to promote events of other local and regional Audubon chapters on our SMRA Zoom Bird Chats.

All Westchester Audubon chapters are co-sponsoring Tom Stephenson's March 11 Zoom program on learning bird song. As we already have 180 people registered, we will need to upgrade our Zoom account to 500 seats just for March to be able to accommodate additional sign-ups.

Although we awarded a Larry Light Youth Scholarship for 2021, the recipient's program at the Bronx Zoo has been cancelled because of the pandemic. The Executive Committee approved deferring this scholarship award until 2022. We may consider funding a 2021 scholarship from the Larry Light Scholarship fund for a virtual youth environmental education program if there is interest and availability.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

On January 27 SMRA presented the second of the webinars in the *Bird's Eye View of Food* series. The program on food choices and their impacts on the environment consisted of a showing of the short film "Diet That Helps Fight Climate Change." The film featured Dr. Maya Almaraz of the University of California, Davis. Following the film, Dr. Almaraz joined our Zoom program to discuss her research on climate friendly innovations that have the potential to be scaled up for widespread use in agriculture.

The Advocacy Committee will be meeting within the next few weeks to continue the planning of our third *Bird's Eye View of Food* webinar. This program will focus on the problem of food waste.

On January 14, SMRA and the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County hosted a Zoom program on the environmental issues related to the siting of commercial solar farms in our area. Our expert panel included Audrey Friedrichsen, land use and environmental advocacy attorney at Scenic Hudson, Mt. Kisco mayor Gina Picinich and Leo Wiegman, former mayor of Croton-on-Hudson and currently executive vice president of the Croton Energy Group. There is a lot of interest in this topic as there are a number of active proposals for large-scale solar development in the region. We had over 140 people signed up for this webinar; we are looking to do follow-up programs on this timely topic.

Richard, commenting on the January 14 and January 27 Zoom programs, expressed the opinion that these were highly informative and professionally done. Richard thanked Tom R. for his efforts at bringing them to fruition. Phil concurred and asked about providing links to recordings of the Zoom programs on the SMRA website. Anne said she would address this.

With the help of Kathleen and Ken we have signed up author Carl Safina to lead a Zoom discussion of his latest book *Becoming Wild*. The date is March 24.

SMRA has become a sponsoring organization of Cure100, a not-for-profit consortium of communities that seeks to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2040. We will provide a link to Cure100 on the SMRA website. Cure100 is looking to sign up more Audubon chapters in New York and Connecticut. We are encouraging Audubon members to use the Cure100 program to assess their personal carbon footprints.

Richard noted that he has received a detailed document on environmental legislation passed by New York State. Addressing climate change is a key component of these legislative efforts. Please see Richard if you would like a copy.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

We will send a notice to our sanctuary trail walkers to check for any damage from the recent nor'easter that brought heavy snow.

We have placed an order for trees from the DEC nursery. Most of these trees will be planted in our Pruyn Sanctuary. We are also getting white pines for planting in Brinton Brook. In mid-February we will do another New York State "Buffer in a Bag" planting at Brinton Brook. Bill has received a donation to SMRA of milkweed seeds from Robert Giordano of Yorktown. Bill will deliver these seeds to Michael for planting in our sanctuaries.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Limitations on in-person programs and outings continue due to the pandemic. Our virtual Bird Chats are being held semimonthly. Additional upcoming virtual programs include Joan Collins discussing birding in the Adirondacks on February 18, Donna Lassiter on how to grow a meadow garden on February 25 and Tom Stephenson on learning birdsong on March 11 (see Executive Director's report, above).

We are discussing moving the Yellowstone trip to the fall of 2021 as a May trip will probably not be possible because of the ongoing pandemic. Also under discussion is rescheduling the postponed trip to South Africa. Possibilities include either April or November in 2022.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

On March 16 we will discuss Carl Safina's latest work, *Becoming Wild*. See the Advocacy Committee report, above, for details on a follow-up program with Dr. Safina.

The book *Seeing Trees* will be the subject of our book club meeting on May 25.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the spring issue is today. This issue covers Mar., Apr., and May. We are looking at doing a four-page issue instead of the six pages of recent issues.

New Business—Valerie Lyle

Cary has been named Bird Commissioner by the Village of Croton-on-Hudson. Board members are urged to let her know if they have ideas for this newly created position.

Richard noted that the position of Executive Director of Audubon New York/Connecticut is vacant. Board members should let Richard know if they can recommend a qualified candidate for this important job.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Cary moved that Val adjourn the meeting; Kathleen seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Val adjourned the meeting at 8:43 pm.

ADDENDUM: 2021 SMRA Zoom Programs for Libraries & Other Organizations

Tuesday, February 2, 7:00 pm – Raptors for Rookies
Teatown Lake Reservation – Virtual EagleFest

Tuesday, March 2, 7:00 pm – Raptors for Rookies
Chester Public Library & Orange County Audubon Society

Tuesday, March 16, 11:00 am – Birding 101
Yonkers Public Library

Wednesday, March 17, 7:00 pm – Bird Friendly Backyards
Mount Kisco Library

Thursday, March 25, 7:00 pm – Birding 101
Lewisboro Library, Bedford Free Library, Ruth Keeler Memorial Library

Wednesday, March 31, 7:30 pm – Bird Architecture
Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

Tuesday, April 6, 7:00 pm – Bird Friendly Backyards
Mount Pleasant Library

Thursday, April 8, 7:00 pm – Birding 101
Larchmont Public Library

Wednesday, April 14, 7:00 pm – Bird Friendly Backyards
Mamaroneck Public Library

Tuesday, April 20, 1:30 pm – Birding 101
Avon Public Library (CT)

Thursday, April 22, 4:00 pm – Bird-Friendly Backyards
North Castle Public Library

Wednesday, April 28, 7:00 pm – Birding 101
Mount Kisco Library