

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**March 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 Novenstern, 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. Prospective board candidate Erik Andersen joined the meeting shortly before its conclusion.

Absent: Nina [online attendance compiled by Rik]

Meeting started at 7:01 pm.

**President's Report—Valerie Lyle**

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Debbie moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on February 1, 2021. Suzanne seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

Phil has informed SMRA that IBM is eliminating matching grants for its retirees; we can expect some impact to donations.

There will be a regular board meeting to be held via Zoom on April 5 as we will not be holding our Annual Dinner this spring.

Prospective board candidate Erik Andersen is expected to join this meeting. He will be asked to give a brief description of his background and interests.

**Membership Report** [Reference Membership and Donation Report as of Feb. 26, 2021]

Total member households are at 1,037, with 472 joint NAS/SMRA member households and 565 SMRA chapter member households. The number of SMRA member households is down slightly as we have eliminated people who have not made a donation or membership payment in the past 3 years.

**Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle**

Board members may expect Annual Fund Drive packets to arrive via email within the next couple of weeks. Please return to Office Manager Ellen Heidelberger after reviewing and updating as needed.

**Nominating Committee—William Kellner**

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the board of directors with a 3-year term to begin on March 1, 2021 and end at the March 2024 meeting of the board of directors: Louisa Gagliardi, Philip Heidelberger, William Kellner, Donna Lassiter, Michael Madias, Jr., Steve Rappaport, Larry Trachtenberg. Valerie asked for a motion and Richard moved that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the board of directors. The motion was seconded by Suzanne. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative. (Note that Ken had not yet joined the meeting.)

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for officers of the board of directors with a 1-year term to begin on March 1, 2021 and end at the March 2022 meeting of the board of directors: President—Valerie Lyle; Vice President—Tom Ruth; Treasurer—Thomas McEnerney; Secretary—William Kellner; Board Chair—Richard Saravay. Valerie asked for a motion and Suzanne moved that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for officers of the board of directors. The motion was seconded by Ginger. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative. (Note that Ken had not yet joined the meeting.)

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Executive Committee with a 1-year term to begin on March 1, 2021 and end at the March 2022 meeting of the board of directors: Valerie Lyle

**Nominating Committee—William Kellner cont'd**

(Chair), Thomas Ruth, William Kellner, Thomas McEnerney, Philip Heidelberger, Richard Saravay. Valerie asked for a motion and Suzanne moved that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Executive Committee. The motion was seconded by Louisa. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative. (Note that Ken had not yet joined the meeting.)

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Audit Committee with a 1-year term to begin on March 1, 2021 and end at the March 2022 meeting of the board of directors: Richard Saravay (Chair), Judith Lavenberg, Henry Seduski. Valerie asked for a motion and Earl moved that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Audit Committee. The motion was seconded by Debbie. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative. (Note that Ken had not yet joined the meeting.)

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Finance Committee with a 1-year term to begin on March 1, 2021 and end at the March 2022 meeting of the board of directors: Philip Heidelberger (Chair), Rik Kaufman, Valerie Lyle, Thomas Ruth, Thomas McEnerney, Patricia Watson, Richard Saravay. Valerie asked for a motion and Louisa moved that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Finance Committee. The motion was seconded by Earl. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative. (Note that Ken had not yet joined the meeting.)

Bill expressed his thanks to Steve Rappaport and John Cavallero for their continued service on the Nominating Committee.

**Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

As of March 1, 2021, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,321,030, a \$16,347 (1.3%) increase above the January 1, 2021 balance of \$1,304,783 and a \$29,013 (2.2%) increase for the month of February. There have been \$9,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2021. As of March 1, 2021 we are \$106,537 (80.8%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. IBM recently announced that they will no longer match the contributions of retirees, so that will likely decrease our matching contributions for the year.

**Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney**

Tom reported that operating revenue for the first two months of the year was about \$18,000, consisting primarily of \$9,000 of donations, about \$6,500 of bird seed sales and a \$1,000 refund from the Bronx Zoo related to a Larry Light Scholarship. Operating expenses for the period were about \$24,000, consisting primarily of \$15,000 of salaries and benefits, \$2,500 of bird seed costs and a \$1,000 partial payment to our fund drive consultant, Sharon Danosky.

The net deficit for the first two months was therefore about \$6,000 and we took \$9,000 out of the endowment. As a result, the checking account balance at the end of February was \$9,600 or about \$3,000 more than at the beginning of the year.

The only unusual financial item in the first two months was the receipt of a notice of charges for up \$3,850 from the New York state unemployment department relating to an unemployment claim filed by Danny Ferguson. Tom reported that he had filed an objection to these charges on the grounds that SMRA continues to employ Danny on the same basis and at the same rate of pay as it always has. Tom is optimistic that SMRA will prevail on its objection.

**Pruyn House—Ginger Bernardin**

Tom M. has negotiated an agreement with Burke Energy to provide fuel oil for Pruy House and we will continue the service contract we have with Burke.

A subcommittee has been formed to review options on dealing with the in-ground oil tank at Pruy House. A meeting has been scheduled with Advanced Environmental of White Plains to review these options that include abandonment or removal of the tank and replacement with an above-ground tank. The subcommittee expects to submit a proposal to the full board at the April 5th meeting of the board of directors.

**Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim**

Our third Saturday seed sale brought in \$1,952. Additional volunteers are being requested for the March third Saturday sale. Larry, Michael, Phil, and Earl committed to help out.

Treasurer Tom M. noted that seed sale revenue to date for the current seed sale season, which began on September 1, 2020, is at \$24,750, with a profit of approximately \$8,000. At this point in the previous seed sale season (early March of 2020), we had revenues of \$16,000 with a \$2,000 profit. Several board members expressed the opinion that the pandemic, which has resulted in many people working out of their homes, as well as the recent cold and snowy weather, were factors in the improvement in seed sales.

We expect to put in another small seed order in March since we are out of some kinds of seed already.

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

The revamped SMRA website is now live. Some of the updated pages were shared for board members to preview at tonight's Zoom meeting. Editing of the site will now be easier for the webmaster. An example is the top banner, which is readily changeable. Facebook and Eventbrite feeds will automatically update on the site.

The COVID response page on the redesigned site was previewed for the board—in-person visitors to the SMRA office must check in here to ensure compliance with the latest requirements. Larry asked whether a query about vaccination status should be added. Anne replied that new guidelines have not yet been issued; we will adjust as needed when that happens.

Money collection pages for donations or event payments have increased levels of security on the new site. Phil asked about how the redesigned site handles visitors who are using smart phones or tablets. Anne replied that the site uses responsive templates, which allow automatic adjustment to the viewer's device. This is important as a significant number—40+%— of site visitors are using smart phones or tablets. Board members are asked to report any issues with the site such as typos or broken links.

There has been a problem with people signing up for in-person walks or trips but not showing up. This is disruptive as COVID restrictions limit the number of attendees. No-shows who don't give prior notice will be contacted and asked not to register for events during the current season.

As a reminder, trips or events that are marked as sold out on the SMRA website will still accept registrations, which will be placed on a waiting list in case of cancellations.

Sandy Morrissey of Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon has spearheaded Eastern Bluebird box trails in Westchester, establishing nest boxes in many locations. Sandy is now ready to install Bluebird boxes in Croton Point Park and SMRA will be partnering in this effort. We are partnering with Ossining High School teacher Danielle Jackson and her students, who will help build boxes and monitor them. Board members interested in attending a nest box banding session with Sandy should reach out to Anne.

We are moving forward with our young birder and family nature walks to be underwritten by the Mertz bequest. Three spring and three fall walks are planned for each age group. Local libraries have been contacted. Kyle Bardwell has agreed to lead the young birder walks and an educator from Rewilding School will lead the family walks.

Our trip to South Africa has been postponed again. It is now being planned for November of 2022. The Yellowstone trip is still on for May 2021. Larry will cover for Anne when she is on the Yellowstone trip by leading the scheduled bird walk at Croton Point Park.

**Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth**

This Thursday (Mar. 4) SMRA will co-host our second webinar on siting of commercial solar projects in our area. Co-sponsors are the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, the Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance, Teatown, and Sustainable Westchester. The webinar will feature Nina Orville of Sustainable Westchester.

**Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth cont'd**

On March 24 we will host a Zoom gathering with author Carl Safina to discuss his book *Becoming Wild* (see also Nature Book Club, below). The third webinar in our series on environmental impacts of food production and consumption will be rescheduled for April or May (subsequently scheduled for June 23). This program will deal with the problem of food waste.

SMRA's partnership with the Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H) is continuing. The H2H working group is meeting to plan future programs.

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 the Cure100 Carbon Tracker on the SMRA website. Individual household data entered into the Carbon Tracker will be anonymously compiled and aggregated with other SMRA entries to enable comparisons of household emissions.

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

Our application to NYS DEC's Buffer in a Bag program has been completed. We are looking to do these plantings later in the spring in our Brinton Brook and Graff Sanctuaries. The board will be updated with the scheduled dates for the plantings.

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

Our fundraising Birdathon for 2021 has been scheduled for Oct 8–10.

We are looking at options for trips in the fall of 2021 and early 2022, including a late September trip to Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in the Finger Lakes and a late January or February trip to the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area in Pennsylvania. We're also looking to do a trip to Delmarva and south Jersey, including Cape May, in the spring of 2022. All trips are subject to modifications based on the status of the Covid pandemic.

Our popular online Bird Chats are continuing as we move into spring twice monthly on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays, but we will switch to 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays just for May.

There has been great interest in our March 11 online program on Learning Birdsong with Tom Stephenson—so far 480 people have signed up.

Larry said that SMRA should consider a trip to Big Bend National Park in Texas. Anne said this is a possibility for the spring of 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. Following that, we are considering the essay collection *When Birds Are Near*, which is edited by Susan Fox Rogers.

Films on Purpose is working with the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County to show a series of films on food. Kathleen will provide the board with details, which are also available on the Films on Purpose website.

**Valerie Lyle—Prospective Board Member**

Erik Andersen, who is considering becoming a candidate for one of the vacancies on the board of directors, joined the meeting. Erik provided the board with a brief bio: following a career as a commodities trader, Erik has served as the Administrator of the Danish Home in Cortlandt Manor. He grew up in Nebraska and Washington, DC in a family with a deep interest in nature and the environment. He has done extensive volunteer work with the Girl Scouts. An avid outdoorsman, Erik has been an active volunteer with SMRA. He has worked with Anne on programs for the Danish Home residents.

**Valerie Lyle—Prospective Board Member cont'd**

Another project in which he participated is the building of the deer exclosures in the Pruyn Sanctuary. Erik told the meeting that he feels his background and interests would make a good fit for the SMRA board and he welcomes the opportunity to serve.

**Newsletter—Anne Swaim**

The deadline for the summer issue is May 1.

**New Business—Valerie Lyle**

Cary, the newly appointed Bird Commissioner of the Village of Croton on Hudson, will be doing a series of articles on birding for the *Croton-Cortlandt Gazette*. She is looking for pictures for a piece on winter birding, including winter ducks. Anne suggested eBird as a source for photos.

Larry reminded board members to check the latest edition of the NYS DEC *Hudson River Almanac* where Steve Rappaport's photo of a gray seal off Verplanck is featured.

**Adjournment—Valerie Lyle**

Larry moved that Val adjourn the meeting; Cary seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Val adjourned the meeting at 8:24 pm.