

Saw Mill River Audubon
April 5, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)
Meeting conducted via Zoom

Present (in bold type): **Erik Andersen, 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, 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 Jenni Stern joined the meeting at 7:15. Newly-elected board member Erik Andersen also joined the meeting at 7:15, following the affirmative board vote on his candidacy (see Nominating Committee report, below).
Absent: none [online attendance compiled by Rik]

Meeting started at 7:00 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 1, 2021. Kathleen seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

SMRA will hold its June board meeting and annual picnic on Monday, June 7 at Senasqua Park in Croton on Hudson. Let the office know of any volunteers whom you feel should be invited. A discussion followed about board members' comfort level with having an in-person, outdoor gathering and whether and how to limit attendance. Debbie suggested that we consider limiting attendance to board members, and possibly, some spouses. Larry pointed out that New York State guidelines for outdoor gatherings now permit up to 200 people. It was decided to resume the discussion at the May board meeting when final decisions would be made about attendance at the June board meeting/picnic.

Nominating Committee—William Kellner

Bill, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the name of Erik Andersen to fill a vacancy in the class of 2024 of the board of directors with a 3-year term to begin on April 5, 2021 and end on April 4, 2024. Bill moved that the board of directors vote to approve Erik Andersen for this 3-year term on the board of directors. The motion was seconded by Ken. The motion was approved with all board members present voting in the affirmative.

President's Report cont'd—Valerie Lyle

The Executive Committee reviewed a letter drafted by Georgia Audubon board and staff and signed onto by New York City Audubon. The letter urges the NAS Board to follow through on promises made in November to hire an outside firm to conduct an independent review of culture, practices, and policies at National Audubon. This promise followed a Nov. 12 Politico article that included accusations by current and former NAS staff of a culture of intimidation and retaliation toward women and people of color at NAS. The Executive Committee decided not to sign on to this letter but rather suggested that SMRA draft its own response to NAS leadership urging NAS to address these concerns in a timely and transparent way. A subcommittee of board member volunteers is being sought to draft the SMRA response and also to review SMRA's own policies on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Valerie agreed to supply the full board with more information about this issue, including an article that appeared on [politico.com](https://www.politico.com) concerning conflicts about diversity at NAS headquarters.

In a review of SMRA committee assignments, committee chairs will be asked to review committee descriptions and member lists. We will then circulate committee descriptions as part of the committee membership review. Anne mentioned that the Education Committee has been dormant but suggested that the ad hoc committee that evaluated implementation of the Ed Mertz bequest could be considered a de facto Education Committee and said another meeting of that group would be helpful in mid-summer.

Valerie welcomed Erik to the board of directors and introduced prospective board candidate Jenni Stern. Jenni provided the following description of her background and interests:

“I have been involved in SMRA through bird walks and, in the past year, the wonderful bird chats and other Zoom programs. I am really impressed by the quality and scope of the organization's work. I am an active hiker and cyclist and sometime backpacker. These outdoor experiences have been greatly enhanced in recent years as I learn more about birds.

My birding mentor is our 27-year-old son who has been working these past few years as a field tech on various research projects around the country.

I have a master's degree in urban planning and a background in journalism. I wrote and edited for many years for the *Rivertown Enterprise*, *Scarsdale Inquirer* and *Record-Review*. More recently, I became a math teacher and taught at a middle school in the Bronx for 8 years. I am now working as a math tutor. I was on the board of the Hastings Historical Society for more than a dozen years and designed and ran their website. I also wrote for and helped edit their newsletter.

I am very alarmed about climate change, having just read Elizabeth Kolbert's *Under a White Sky*. I am now reading *A World on the Wing* by Scott Wiedensaul, which also details the present and future effects of climate, especially on migrating birds. I have developed a keen interest in native plants in recent years. I am trying to turn my yard in Yonkers, where we moved 6 years ago, from a blank expanse of grass into a wildlife haven, and last year I began volunteering as an invasive species mapper for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.”

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

Our development consultant has drafted the letter for our 2021 annual fund drive. We hope to mail our fundraising letters by mid-May. The matching grant program has been simplified this year to match all contributions above the basic \$35 membership dues up to a maximum of \$50,000. Because of past donations, the anonymous donor's remaining contribution is now less than \$50,000. Ellen and Phil will match the difference to reach the \$50,000 level.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of April 1, 2021, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,346,824, a \$42,041 (3.2%) increase above the January 1, 2021 balance of \$1,304,783 and a \$25,694 (1.9%) increase for the month of March. There have been \$9,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2021. As of April 1, 2021, we are \$103,501 (78.5%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals from the investment portfolio in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Erik asked if SMRA's assets are in tier 1 assets. Tom M. responded that they are.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[reference report: Operating Revenues and Expenses for 3 Months Ended March 31, 2021]

Tom shared the report using the Zoom share screen function. He noted that operating revenues for the first 3 months of 2021 are about \$3,600 ahead of budget primarily due to higher bird seed sales. Donations and membership are also slightly ahead of budget. Expenses for the first 3 months are about equal to expectations. The net deficit of \$13,688 is about \$3,800 better than budget.

The deficit and about \$1,200 of Pruyn House repairs were covered by transferring \$9,000 from the endowment and by about \$6,200 of unbudgeted revenue. The unbudgeted revenue consisted of about \$4,000 in Yellowstone trip deposits, \$1,200 of Larry Light scholarship donations and refunds and a \$1,000 NAS collaborative grant.

Erik asked whether SMRA uses accrual- or cash-based accounting. Tom answered that we use cash-based accounting.

Pruyn House—Ginger Bernardin

[reference: Proposal: Pruyn House Oil Tank Replacement]

The Pruyn House Committee met with a representative of Advanced Environmental, SMRA's selected contractor for tank removal and new tank installation. Based on this meeting and other factors, the Committee advises that we should proceed with tank removal rather than abandonment.

Ginger submitted the following proposal to the board:

Pruyn House cont'd—Ginger Bernardin

We want to change from an underground oil tank to an above ground oil tank in the basement.

Background: we currently have tank leakage insurance with ProGuard. The oil tank was installed 1947 when Pruy House was built. It is a 1,000 gallon tank, located under the front lawn of Pruy House under and along the residence walkway. There is no evidence of leakage.

Approval requested from SMRA board for the following two steps.

1. First to conduct soil tests—four borings around existing tank to a depth below the tanks—per state specifications—and, if done by an approved ProGuard testing company, we stay within oil tank insurance coverage. Our selected soil testing company is Ecologic with quote of \$575. We compared four soil test companies.

2. Second to proceed with tank removal and replacement—see below for details about various scenarios and insurance responses during these steps. Our selected tank contractor is Advanced Environmental. Used by some of our board members with a very favorable interview with tank subcommittee.

a. If no soil contamination from tests, we would proceed with AE quote of \$5,200 for oil tank removal and installation of new tank, same day work for both, town/state permitting process and utility line tracing/marketing initiated by Advanced Environmental as are any needed ProGuard notifications.

b. If soil contamination discovered during/after tank pull AND if this is due to tank failure, we will receive some insurance offset (see below) against tank removal/installation costs after a \$2,000 deductible.

- i. More importantly, any soil cleanup costs, and additional required soil testing would then also be covered under our tank insurance policy—if oil contamination result of tank failure and not contractor error.
- ii. Above is true even though we are doing a volunteer pull of the tank because we are first doing soil tests by a ProGuard-approved testing company.
- iii. If contractor error results in contamination, cleanup costs would be on the contractor.

Pruyn House Oil Tank Removal Process (Steps Below Verified with ProGuard)

Soil Tests Performed

We have confirmed with ProGuard that doing the soil tests does NOT affect tank insurance policy.

1. If Negative Soil Tests (no oil leak detected) and then old tank is pulled
 - a. No leakage/contamination detected during tank pull—new tank installed. All is well. Contact ProGuard re: policy change. (Note: no prorating of Spring 2021 policy payment for larger, underground tank)
 - b. Leakage/Contamination detected after tank is pulled. ProGuard contacted within 24 hours
 1. Assuming tank defect is reason for oil spill, ProGuard policy comes into effect with coverage up to \$100K for cleanup
 2. ProGuard person on site to inspect old tank and soil conditions to assess for coverage
 3. A \$500 fee is charged for on site ProGuard supervision, but this is then subtracted from our overall deductible of \$2,500.
2. IF Positive Soil Tests—ProGuard contacted within 24 hours with same conditions as leakage/contamination steps above PLUS:
 - \$1,500 from ProGuard toward new tank installation costs
 - Up to \$1,500 for tank removal (varies with total removal costs)

Additional Considerations

- Advanced Environmental confirmed as approved ProGuard contractor for tank removal and new tank installation.
- However, if a soil cleanup is needed from a leak, ProGuard selects the soil cleanup contractor and this contractor may or may not be Advanced Environmental.

- ProGuard doesn't pay for oil pump out/transfer of oil (but this is included in AE quote).
- ProGuard doesn't cover any associated property damage. [end proposal]

Tom M. noted that we could leave the current tank in the ground but, looking to end future risk, he also noted that the committee strongly recommends proceeding with the above proposal. Ginger moved to proceed with soil testing and tank removal as outlined in the proposal. Phil provided a second for this motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Pruyn Garden—Donna Lassiter

We have new hours for weekly volunteer work in the Pruy garden—Tuesday OR Thursday, 9:30 AM–12:30 PM. We would welcome additional volunteers. The mission of the garden is to demonstrate the growing of native plants and educate the public about why this is so important for the environment. Valerie expressed agreement with these comments, saying that her work as a garden volunteer has been very rewarding.

Sanctuaries Committee—Anne Swaim reporting for Michael Madias, Jr.

Brinton Brook and Pruy Sanctuary meadows were mowed by Danny in late March.

We are waiting on the DEC ship date of the “Buffer in a Bag” plants for Brinton Brook, Choate and Graff Sanctuaries. Once we have that date, we will set up a planting date.

The trees Michael purchased from the NYS DEC are expected to be available for pickup in late April. After pickup we'll set up planting dates for those trees and shrubs as well. We are planning to plant some of these inside the deer exclosures at Pruy Sanctuary, among other places.

Michael will be doing a Brinton Brook wild flower planting on Croton Earth Day (April 24th) if anyone wants to help or stop by. Meeting 9:00 am in the main parking area of Brinton Brook.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H) held a training program last week about fundraising during the COVID pandemic. Four H2H member organizations participated, describing their fundraising efforts in these unprecedented times. Tom will summarize and distribute the take-aways from this discussion.

On March 24 we hosted a Zoom gathering with author Carl Safina to discuss his book *Becoming Wild*, which was also the topic of our Nature Book Club selection earlier in March. Carl gave us a fascinating presentation about how culture is not just a human development but is found in a variety of animal species.

Our third “Bird's Eye View of Food” program, focusing on the problem of food waste, will be held on June 23. The Advocacy Committee will meet to plan for this event.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Our popular Zoom Bird Chats are continuing. Upcoming dates include April 13, April 27, May 4, May 18.

On April 15 we'll present a Zoom program “Western Tales of an Eastern Birder” featuring former SMRA board member David McIntyre on birding in California.

Another upcoming Zoom program (April 20) will be “Behind the Scenes at eBird” featuring Kyle Bardwell and Sean Camillieri.

Our small group bird walks are ongoing; we have no plans at the moment to expand beyond our limit of 10 participants.

We are planning a trip to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in September. We have yet to finalize the specific dates.

Our trip to the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area in Pennsylvania is scheduled for March. Specific dates will be selected based on eBird reports. We hope to see 100,000 or more Snow Geese.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

The book *Seeing Trees* will be the subject of our book club meeting on May 11. After the May meeting, we won't meet again until at least September. A possible selection for the fall is the essay collection *When Birds Are Near*, edited by Susan Fox Rogers. *A World on the Wing* by Scott Weidensaul is another possibility. Kathleen will send out a link to a discussion with the author on the *Fresh Air* podcast.

Richard suggested that the book club consider Doug Tallamy's new book, *The Nature of Oaks*.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

Ken noted that "The Riverkeeper Sweep," the Hudson Riverkeeper's annual spring cleanup, is scheduled for May 1. See riverkeeper.org for local events.

Our third Saturday seed sale in March brought in \$693.50. Consistent, strong sales mean we may not need to hold a spring sale to reduce our excess inventory. Volunteers are needed for the April 17 sale. Michael, Ken, Phil, Steve, and Earl volunteered.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Nature Explorer Walk registrations are coming in slowly, so we are expanding promotion beyond the three public libraries. These walks are funded by the Mertz bequest. Brian Kluepfel and his wife have offered to provide Spanish translation on these walks. The "Young Birder Walks," also funded by the Mertz bequest, are attracting many registrations.

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. Where the host libraries are in the territories of other Audubon chapters, local chapter information will be displayed. Also, we will continue to announce events of other Audubon chapters on our SMRA Zoom Bird Chats.

The Purple Martin tower at Croton Point Park has been put up by John Phillips. Don't get fooled by the decoy Purple Martin; we hope to see the real thing soon. Bluebird boxes built by Ossining High School students installed at Croton Point are attracting at least one Eastern Bluebird.

We're happy to report that Rockefeller State Park Preserve has put up Kestrel boxes; we're waiting to see if we get nesting Kestrels. Boxes for Wood Ducks have been installed as well. Rockefeller has adjusted mowing schedules to better manage ground nesting bird habitat. We'll see if there is a positive impact on Bobolink and Meadowlark numbers.

Great Horned Owls are on their nests now. To avoid disturbing these birds, nest locations should never be posted on social media.

A ninth library (North Salem) is joining the Mr. Lunetta Explorer Bag program. LL Bean may donate additional backpacks, requested by the adventure activities manager, Carl Steiniger, at the Ridge Hill LL Bean for SMRA.

Our newsletter editor Brian Kluepfel has a regular column on birding in *The Examiner News*. Because of this, SMRA is offered free ad space to promote our upcoming events each month. A recent ad was displayed.

Our application to National Audubon for a collaborative grant to produce and install six bilingual directional signs and ten "discovery" location signs for the Pruyin Sanctuary has been approved (see February 2021 board meeting minutes for details). The grant amount is \$1,000. We are in the process of designing the new signs.

We are working with an Eagle Scout who plans to build five Screech-Owl boxes on poles for the SMRA sanctuaries. Anne suggested project costs could be funded by box sponsorship at \$100/box and a flyer and payment form has been set up on the SMRA website. A sign showing the donor's name will appear on the box.

The upcoming Yellowstone trip has space for two more people but is good to go with 9 participants plus Anne Swaim. Trip dates are May 10–16. As agreed, a COVID vaccination is required.

Executive Director's Report cont'd—Anne Swaim

Croton Point Park has secured funding for a third year of reseeded the capped landfill. Additional application of herbicide to remove invasives has also been funded. Ongoing maintenance is a potential problem. Invasives have been knocked back but are still present on the landfill. Ron Anderson is the new superintendent of Croton Point Park.

Cary noted that signs requiring walkers to keep dogs on leash and stay on the designated path on the landfill are being ignored. Anne pointed out that invasive plant removal has taken place along the low/river road at Croton Point Park.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the summer issue is May 1.

New Business—Valerie Lyle

In 2021 board meetings have been scheduled for May 3, June 7 (picnic), Sept. 13, Oct. 4, Dec. 6. The Annual Dinner is scheduled for Sunday, Sept 26.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

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