

Saw Mill River Audubon
September 13, 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, Jenni Stern, Larry Trachtenberg, Debbie van Zyl, Kathleen Williamson.** Executive Director Anne Swaim was also present. Absent: Kathleen, Suzanne, Michael, Earl [online attendance compiled by Rik]

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 7, 2021. Debbie seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

The SMRA board retreat held at Mariandale on August 29th was well attended. Reports of the three group breakouts—Advocacy, Education and Fundraising—have been submitted. These reports will be used to plan activities for the upcoming year.

Our Annual Dinner, scheduled for September 26th, will not be an in-person event. Instead we will be having a virtual gathering, which will feature a similar program to that planned for the event at Crabtree's Kittle House. Sales of tickets for the quilt raffle, which will be a part of the Sept. 26 event, have been sluggish; board members are urged to continue their efforts to sell raffle tickets. More details about the event's fundraising aspects will be provided in the Fundraising Committee Report that follows.

With the designation of an Airborne Infectious Disease Emergency by Governor Hochul, SMRA is required to implement an Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan for our office. See the Treasurer's Report, below, for more details.

We were very sad to learn of the passing in August of former SMRA board member Joanne McAuley. At this time funeral and burial arrangements are pending. The board will be notified as soon as information is available.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference report Membership and Donation Report as of September 10, 2021]

We are a bit behind in donations this year when compared to the same point last year, although membership numbers are up. Of our total 1,073 member households, 596 are SMRA chapter member households; the remainder are joint NAS/SMRA member households. The Small Group Bird Walks have helped bring in new members. See the Treasurer's report, below, for additional details on donations, including the Annual Fund Drive.

Fundraising Committee Report—Louisa Gagliardi

Our second annual fundraising calendar is ready to go to the printer. We are expecting a higher profit margin compared to last year's calendar. If we sell the entire print run, we expect a profit of approximately \$1,300 including the photographers' entry fees.

Our annual fundraising Birdathon is coming up. A letter is being sent to area Audubon chapters and bird clubs inviting them to participate. Donations received by other Audubon chapter and bird club teams will be shared with those organizations.

The fundraising tea hosted by Cary in June was an enjoyable event. It raised \$700 for SMRA.

We have received six items for our Silent Auction, which will be a part of our virtual gathering on Sept. 26: a gift certificate to the Ocean House restaurant; a private bird walk with Anne; a personal consultation with our Master Gardener, Donna; use of Charlie Roberto's beach house in Cape May; a subscription to Birds & Beans shade grown coffee; and a private outing with photographer Bill Golden.

Fundraising Committee Report—Lynn Salmon

Lynn reported on the fundraising photography exhibit scheduled for February, 2022 at the Hendrik Hudson Library in Montrose. We'll feature nature photos from local photographers that will be displayed in the large upstairs community room at the library. We plan to hold a reception in the exhibit space. Photographs will be available for sale, with a 20% commission going to SMRA and 10% for the library. The submission deadline for photographs is November 15; we are looking to accept between 35 and 50 photographs.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

[Reference reports: SMRA Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix -July 1, 2021 and SMRA Investment Portfolio Performance Report for Period Ending March 31, 2021]

For our official quarterly report, as of July 1, 2021, the portfolio balance was \$1,405,397, a \$100,614 (7.7%) increase above the January 1, 2021 balance of \$1,304,783. The year-to-date, one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were 8.4%, 25.4%, 11.8% and 11.1% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 7.4%, 22.3%, 9.2% and 8.5% for the same periods.

The balance as of September 1, 2021 was \$1,443,619 which is a \$25,147 (1.8%) increase for the month of August and a \$138,836 (10.6%) increase for the year. There have been \$9,500 in additions to and \$27,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2021. As of September 1, 2021, we are \$61,747 (46.8%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Reference document: for SMRA]

New York State has instituted a requirement for all employers to prepare an Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan. SMRA's draft plan has been submitted to board members by email prior to this meeting.

These plans will be implemented when the state declares an Infectious Disease Emergency. Such a declaration was made by Governor Hochul on September 6, requiring employers to activate their plans.

Richard asked if the SMRA plan mentions a vaccination requirement for entrance into the SMRA office. Tom McE. replied that the draft does not mention vaccination. He also noted that the draft plan has a maximum office occupancy of two people. Richard, joined by Larry and Phil, expressed support for adding a vaccination requirement.

Tom McE. moved that the board of directors adopt the draft Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan with the addition of mandating visitors be fully vaccinated before they are allowed to enter the SMRA office. Phil provided a second for this motion. All board members present voted in the affirmative to adopt the Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan for SMRA.

[Reference reports: SMRA Operating Revenues and Expenses for the 8 Months Ended August 31, 2021 and Explanation of Unbudgeted Revenues and Expenses. Anne shared the reports using the Zoom share screen function.]

Tom reported that Revenues for the first eight months of the year are about \$4,000 ahead of budget, primarily due to higher bird seed sales. The Annual Fund is close to budget, the Quilt Raffle is below budget and \$3,600 of one time gifts results in donations being slightly ahead of budget. Expenses are about \$2,000 under budget for the eight months.

As a result, the net deficit of \$17,500 is about \$6,000 better than budget. Unbudgeted expenses of about \$12,800 consisted primarily of \$8,800 of Pruy House repairs, including the oil tank replacement and plumbing work. We took \$27,000 out of the endowment and had about \$6,300 of unbudgeted revenue, consisting primarily of Annual Dinner deposits and an unemployment insurance refund under the Federal Covid-19 relief law. The result was that the checking account balance increased by about \$2,900 since the beginning of the year.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

The first pickup date for our annual seed sale is Sept. 25. Additional volunteers are needed for traffic control and contact-free loading of seed on this date. Several board members expressed their availability. Anne will submit a schedule with volunteer shift times and assigned functions.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

The Rewilding School will be donating 10% of their revenues to SMRA from their programs at our Brinton Brook and Pruyn Sanctuaries. We anticipate monthly donations in the range of \$1,300–\$1,500 for the 9-month schedule for 2021-22. Programs at Brinton Brook are run mornings and afternoons, Monday–Friday. Pruyn programs are scheduled for mornings, Tuesday through Friday. The Rewilding School is looking to schedule a volunteer workday for parents this fall at Brinton Brook.

On the last day of the Rewilding School's spring programs at Brinton Brook, a child became ill. The parents were called by Rewilding School staff and the child was transported to the New York-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital in Cortlandt Manor. The child was subsequently taken to the Westchester Medical Center. The tentative diagnosis is that the child had a reaction to something they ate. We understand they have made a full recovery. SMRA informed its insurance carrier after we were informed by Eric Stone of this incident. Eric has passed on to SMRA any information he has received. There was no further follow up from the parents or from Westchester Child Protective Services which did an inquiry as required.

SMRA has designated the period from November 1 through December 31, 2021 for bowhunting of deer by approved hunters in our Brinton Brook, Pruyn and Choate Sanctuaries following the same safety procedures as past years. Hunting in Brinton Brook is limited to the portion of the sanctuary outside the Village of Croton-on-Hudson. Steve moved that the board of directors approve the bow hunting as described above. Lynn seconded the motion. All board members presented voted in the affirmative.

Representatives for the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) and the five Westchester County Audubon chapters had a virtual meeting with County Executive Latimer to discuss issues related to the Westchester County Parks. Meeting attendees made several requests of the County Executive, including making park capital projects and major maintenance project available on the Park web site for public transparency and comment and posting the minutes and meeting schedule of the Parks Commission. Mr. Latimer said he would see that these requests are implemented. FCWC and the Audubon chapters will continue to follow up with the hope that ongoing problems with the Parks Dept. can be mitigated.

SMRA's policy is to sign on to advocacy letters when requested by Audubon New York. Recently we have signed on to letters relating to the state's renewable energy policies. Copies of these letters are available for board members to review.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

The Advocacy Committee will have a follow-up meeting on Sept. 20 to continue our planning for the upcoming year that we began at the August 29 board retreat. Included among the goals we have set are looking to calculate SMRA's carbon footprint and publicizing the results, holding a training session for using the Cure100 Carbon Tracker and possibly partnering with the Cure100 group in Yorktown in addition to the Croton-on-Hudson Cure100 group. We are also looking at initiatives to foster better habitat management in 3 areas: 1) siting of solar farms; 2) on large corporate campuses and 3) other large, undeveloped properties that are not wooded. The idea is to have a positive impact on wildlife, especially ground-nesting birds and pollinators. Finally, we are looking at doing an informational program on plastics recycling and exploring ways of increasing the relatively small amount of discarded plastics that is recycled.

Richard referred to Audubon New York's advocacy, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy, of state regulation of neonicotinoid pesticides. SMRA has signed on to Audubon New York's letter favoring state regulation of these products, which have been proven to harm birds and other wildlife

Board members were reminded that a statement of SMRA's concerns related to the siting of large-scale solar power projects is being submitted to the board of directors with today's meeting materials. SMRA is advocating that siting and implementation of these projects be done in an environmentally sensitive way that minimizes habitat disturbance and wildlife impacts, especially in wooded areas,

Anne is sending a letter requesting full environmental review of a large residential development proposed for a property adjacent to Pocantico Lake in Sleepy Hollow. The proposal calls for 31 single family homes to be built in this environmentally sensitive area of the Town of Mt. Pleasant.

SMRA has co-promoted with Films on Purpose a presentation of the film *Kiss the Ground*, which is about regenerative agriculture.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Valerie Lyle for Michael Madias, Jr.

Donna reported on the August 15th program at the Pruyn gardens. We had about 30 visitors. There were good discussions with these attendees who learned about the benefits of native plants. Three visitors mentioned their observations of a healthy number of insects in the Pruyn gardens.

Steve reported on the project to install a streaming feeder cam at Pruyn. We are exploring a grant from Con Edison to cover costs, as much as \$2,500. Once installed, a view of Pruyn bird feeders would be streamed on YouTube and available for remote lessons at area schools.

Nancy Heppner donated a bench and plaque at the Graff Sanctuary, providing a nice spot to rest and contemplate the Hudson River below.

A video of our trail maintenance program held earlier this year is available on our website. New signups for our Trail Walker program are encouraged to view the video.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Our well-attended Bird Chats on Zoom are continuing on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month. Next up is tomorrow with a discussion of birding sites in Orange County, Florida.

Our Small Group Bird walks are continuing. Attendance has been excellent.

SMRA's Nature Book Club will hold its next meeting on Zoom on September 21 when we'll discuss Helen Macdonald's *Vesper Flights*.

We had a pop-up field trip yesterday that was very well attended—19 people showed up to bird the Liberty Loop along the Wallkill River in Orange and Sussex Counties. We will implement a registration policy for future popup trips to limit participants.

We're planning a trip to the Fire Island Hawk Watch on October 16th.

The postponed South Africa trip is scheduled for November 2022.

Uncertainties related to the pandemic are forcing us to hold off planning additional overnight trips at this time.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the winter issue is Nov. 1. This issue will cover December 2021 and January and February, 2022.

New Business—Valerie Lyle

Richard asked if anyone else is interested in attending the in-person Audubon New York-Connecticut Council meeting scheduled for Oct. 29–31 in Southbury CT. Richard is planning to go. Val and Tom R. are not yet decided. Anne is not attending.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Louisa moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Cary seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:31 pm.