

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**December 5, 2022 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)**  
**Meeting held via Zoom**

Present (in bold type): Erik Andersen, **Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Louisa Gagliardi, Mitchell Goldfarb, Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, Bill Kellner, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenstern, 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: Erik

Meeting started at 7:02 PM.

**President's Report—Valerie Lyle**

Valerie noted that a quorum was present.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on October 3, 2022 as circulated. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Suzanne Kavic. Carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Attention was called to the dates of upcoming board meetings listed on the agenda; the January meeting will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 11 because of a special event scheduled for Jan. 9.

Board members either have received or will receive shortly packets with letters to PS and mail as part of the 2022 Annual Fund Drive. These letters will go to non-respondents to the initial fund drive mailing.

**Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth**

The committee has met twice since the last board meeting. We are pleased that Kara Mason has joined the committee. Our discussions have led to a focus on the issue of bird collisions with buildings and how to make them more bird-safe and how to make corporate properties more bird-friendly. Jenni is spearheading this effort.

A related effort includes a look at how to make houses safe for birds. We are planning a webinar (“Birds → Windows, A Lethal Combination”) for Feb. 16, which will feature experts on this topic. We’ll also solicit input from members on creative solutions they have implemented and present them at the webinar.

A second webinar will deal with the problem of artificial outdoor lighting and its impacts on birds, other wildlife, human health and neighborhood aesthetics. Bill and Ken will lead the planning on the program; we are looking at a date in May.

Updating SMRA’s involvement with the effort to save the Buttonhook property, which the Chappaqua Central School District is looking to sell, the Advocacy Committee agreed to compose a letter of support for preserving the property as open space and get it to the school district in time for their upcoming public meeting. Ken drafted an excellent letter, which the Advocacy Committee and the Executive Committee approved. The Friends of Buttonhook have published our letter on their website and Facebook page. As of today, no decision has been made on the sale of the property. A lawsuit has been filed against the district by the prospective developer who alleges that the district is in breach of contract for failing to obtain the promised development approvals from the relevant government agencies.

Finally, Tom reported on the NY/CT Audubon Council Meeting, held October 21–23, 2022 in Rochester, which he attended. Speakers covered the Great Lakes Vision Plan and the barrier island restoration efforts at Braddock Bay on Lake Ontario. Workshops included efforts to work with college Audubon chapters; local examples included projects undertaken by Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Erin McGrath of Audubon NY spoke on the importance of securing passage of Proposition 1 for environmental funding that appeared on the November election ballot statewide. SMRA participated in the challenge to publicize the need to support Prop. 1, which handily passed.

Ken thanked Tom for his hard work in planning so many successful programs.

## **Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle**

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of December 2, 2022]

With the current 646 SMRA chapter member households and 494 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,140. A recent purge by NAS of NAS/SMRA households accounts for the lower NAS/SMRA household number.

Tom McE. commented on the report, saying that the Birdathon revenue, which was missing, should be shown as \$900 for 2022.

## **Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2022, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,210,545, a \$241,633 (16.6%) decrease below the January 1, 2022 balance of \$1,452,208 and a \$58,457 (4.6%) decrease for the third quarter. As of October 1, the YTD, one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were -17.8%, -13.8%, 3.6% and 4.6% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of -16.0%, -13.1%, 2.0% and 2.8% for the same periods. The balance as of December 1, 2022 was \$1,290,466, which is a \$79,921 (6.6%) increase for the months of October and November and a \$161,742 (11.1%) decrease for the year. As of December 1, there have been \$51,000 in withdrawals from and \$44,701 in additions to the portfolio so far during 2022. As of December 1, 2022, we are \$86,967 (57.1%) 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 Report: SMRA 2023 Budget (12-01-22)]

Tom reported that the audit of SMRA's 2021 financial statements was completed in November without any issues or problems being found by the auditors. Copies of the audited financial statements are available from the office for any board member who wants it.

Revenues for the first 11 months were ahead of budget, primarily due to higher Donations, which already exceeds the total year budget. Expenses for the period were a little higher than budget and the net deficit was about \$62,400. However, withdrawals from the endowment were only \$51,000 because unbudgeted revenues exceeded unbudgeted expenses by more than \$14,000 for the first 11 months. This was due primarily to about \$10,000 in donations from the Rewilding School and the Chappaqua Friends.

Tom then reviewed the proposed 2023 budget and discussed each line item in the budget. He noted that the Donations budget for 2023 had been increased due to the inclusion of the expected donation from the Rewilding School. He also noted that the cost of paper and supplies, heating oil and electricity and printing had increased this year due to inflation. This resulted in the 2023 budgets for Office Operations, Pruy House, the Newsletter and PR & Fund Raising to increase over their 2022 budgets. He noted that the 2023 budgeted deficit of about \$79,500 was 6.7% of SMRA's endowment, which exceeds the 5% guideline.

At this point Anne Swaim disconnected from the meeting and Tom disclosed the proposed raises for Anne and the other employees that were included in the proposed 2023 budget. During the discussion Tom referenced Anne's compensation over the last five years and several Board members made comments and asked questions. The Board agreed that the raises included in the proposed 2023 budget were fair and reasonable in light of SMRA's current financial condition.

Anne then returned to the meeting. Motion: To approve the proposed 2023 budget. Motion by: Richard Saravay. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

## **Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novensterm**

The shed is fairly empty, meaning we have ordered well and sales have been good. We are looking to purchase more large bags of sunflower chips and suet. The Seed Sale Committee will discuss placing a re-order.

We need volunteers to sign up to work at the Dec. 17 sale at Pruy Sanctuary. Michael and Phil said they will take the first shift. Ken offered to work the 11:00 AM-1:00 PM shift.

Larry asked why the price of seed had declined in recent months. Ken replied that supply chain issues were improving and that more Ukrainian sunflower seed was reaching the market (Ukraine is the major supplier of sunflower seed to the global market). Tom McE. affirmed that there had in fact been a significant spike in sunflower seed prices but they have now declined.

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

Anne reported that through Erik we have a donation of N95 masks and antimicrobial wipes. These are available to board members; please contact the office if interested.

The South Africa trip was a great success. Cary and Kathleen said it exceeded their expectations. Read more about the trip in Debbie's detailed article in the winter newsletter. We will offer a program about it in 2023.

Anne presented the Rewilding School's proposal to the Board to continue their programs at Brinton Brook Sanctuary through June 2024. The Executive Committee had already reviewed it and recommended the Board approve it. These programs align with our educational mission. An added benefit is that the parents of the young Rewilding students develop a connection with our sanctuary. An example is the family stewardship days where parents help with sanctuary maintenance. SMRA has been very pleased with our relationship with the Rewilding School. We have received an average monthly donation of \$1,000 from them. Note that the maximum number of students per class is ten; sessions are held in the morning and afternoon.

Tom McE. noted that holding outdoor classes in our sanctuary has the potential of liability for SMRA. While we think we have adequate insurance coverage, it is important that the full board express support for continuing this program.

Anne mentioned that the parking lot at Brinton has been expanded; this will help deal with parking issues during class sessions. Cary said the relationship with the Rewilding School furthers the SMRA mission.

Motion: To accept the proposal from the Rewilding School to continue the relationship with SMRA in which the Rewilding School will host programs in the Brinton Brook Sanctuary from January 2023 through June 2024. Motion by: Mitchell Goldfarb. Seconded by: Suzanne Kavic. Motion carried (with all present voting affirmatively).

SMRA has received a grant of over \$1,000 from Con Edison to establish a "Trail Greeters" program. The idea is to set up tables staffed by board members or other SMRA member volunteers at our sanctuary entrances. We hope to gain information about sanctuary visitors and educate them about SMRA and its mission. A possible bonus is the acquisition of new members. We plan to begin next month. Board members interested in participating should notify Anne.

SMRA will host the Annual Meeting of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) to be held Sept. 22–24, 2023. Anne called on Debbie, who is coordinating our planning. Debbie displayed a spreadsheet showing potential board member assignments to 12 working committees that will be set up to plan all aspects of the meeting. There will be a planning session held via Zoom this Thursday (Dec. 8). This is an "all hands on deck" effort. In addition to SMRA board members, a number of local birders and SMRA members have volunteered to help. The meeting will be a multi-site event with possible venues at Croton Point County Park and Mariandale. Expected turnout is over 200.

### **Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim**

Upcoming events include:

-tomorrow—SMRA's Nature Book Club will hold its first in-person meeting (at the Mount Pleasant Library) since the pandemic. David Gessner's *Leave It As It Is* will be discussed.

-Dec. 10—*Avian Illustrations: Cultural Images of Birds*. Author Boria Sax will discuss the complex history of the relationship between birds and humans in this program at the Chappaqua Library, which is being co-sponsored by Saw Mill River Audubon.

-Jan. 9—SMRA, the Jacob Burns Film Center and Films on Purpose will host a showing of the acclaimed 3-D film "Wings Over Water." The other four Westchester Audubon chapters are expected to co-sponsor and cross-promote. There will be a panel discussion with the film makers at the showing. Following the film and discussion, the Burns Center will host a reception at the Burns Media Arts Lab.

-Jan. 25—Pamela Hunt, PhD, Senior Biologist at New Hampshire Audubon will tell us all about Bird Migration in a Zoom program sponsored by Hudson River Audubon and co-sponsored by all five Westchester Audubon chapters.

Consult the SMRA website for upcoming field trips in the January through March time period. We have scheduled some afternoon field trips at Croton Point as an experiment. Also, we are looking for volunteers to lead additional trips, for example to the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge.

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

As previously reported, we are holding a series of walks in our sanctuaries to evaluate the trail networks for possible problem areas that may be subject to erosion in case of heavy precipitation events. Extreme rainfall episodes are expected to become more frequent because of climate change. The walks are an effort to prioritize where trail work is needed to stay on top of this issue. We are also assessing the presence of invasive species of plants. Last Friday a number of board members and Anne walked the trails at Pinecliff Sanctuary. An added bonus were the geocaches that Lynn helped some board members to find. Our final walks will be at Choate Sanctuary on Dec. 9.

Anne reported that so far only two deer have been taken in the SMRA deer management program—one at Brinton Brook and one at Choate. Hunting is only allowed during daytime hours; there is evidence that local deer are becoming more nocturnal, possibly due to increased visitors on local trails. This leaves only a brief window at dawn and dusk when hunting is more likely to be successful. Another possible reason for some reduction in local deer numbers may be epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD).

We want to install a sign for the Briggs Lane entrance of the Graff Sanctuary which is currently unmarked. This will help clarify how to access the trail network via the right-of-way from the street. We will need to get a permit from the Village of Croton-on-Hudson to install the sign.

Rain held down attendance at our day-after Thanksgiving walk at Turkey Mountain. Our second Saturday walk at Brinton Brook will be Dec. 10.

**Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The winter issue newsletter is in production.

**New Business—Valerie Lyle**

Larry proposed that SMRA delete its Twitter account. A discussion followed; most board members who spoke agreed with Larry. Anne said our Twitter account has not been very active.

Motion: SMRA shall disengage its Twitter account. Motion by: Bill Kellner. Seconded by: Suzanne Kavic. Motion carried (with two abstentions).

Louisa thanked Birdathon participants. Seven teams raised \$900 for SMRA. Note that 2023 New York Birds calendars are still available.

**Adjournment—Valerie Lyle**

Motion: That Valerie adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Louisa Gagliardi. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:53 PM.