

**Saw Mill River Audubon
January 11, 2023 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 and prospective board candidate Kara Mason were also present. Attendance compiled by Rik.

Absent: Erik, Jenni, Debbie

Meeting started at 7:01 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 December 5, 2022 as circulated. Motion by: Ginger. Seconded by: Suzanne. Carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Attention was called to the dates of upcoming board meetings listed on the agenda. Note that our Annual Dinner is scheduled for April 2 (see New Business, below, for more on this gathering, which will be a potluck dinner this year). The board was reminded that our upcoming March and May board of directors' meetings will be in person at the Croton Free Library. These will be hybrid meetings, with an option to participate via Zoom.

Board members were reminded to download and save the updated board and officers roster that was attached to the meeting email from the SMRA office.

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Also attached to the meeting email was the SMRA Conflict of Interest statement, which all board members need to fill out each year. This form is available as a fill-in PDF file, which may be emailed back to the office. Alternatively, board members may print out the form, and mail or fax the completed form back to the office.

A warm welcome was given to Kara Mason, who is a prospective candidate to fill one of the vacancies on the board of directors. Kara spoke about her increasing involvement with SMRA following her retirement, including participation in bird walks and joining the Advocacy Committee. She described the current state of the environment as an "all hands on deck" situation, with everyone needing to be involved. She went on to say that serving on the board would be a critical part of her commitment to the environment.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of December 31, 2022]

With the current 667 SMRA chapter member households and 502 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,169.

The 2022 Annual Fund Drive has been very successful. Another \$19,000 was received in December alone; donations are still coming in as we head into 2023.

Nominating Committee—Bill Kellner

We are planning to hold the election for board members and officers at our March meeting. The Committee will send a query to all members and officers whose terms are expiring in 2023 asking them to confirm that they would like to stand for reelection.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of January 1, 2023, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,249,925, a \$202,283 (13.9%) decrease below the January 1, 2022 balance of \$1,452,208, a \$40,541 (3.1%) decrease for the month of December, and a \$39,380 (3.3%) increase for the fourth quarter. There were \$51,880 in withdrawals from and \$44,701 in additions to the portfolio during 2022. As of January 1, 2023, we are \$73,315 (46.1%) 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 Reports: SMRA 2022 Operating Revenue and Expenses *and* Explanation of Unbudgeted Revenues and Expenses]

Revenues for 2022 were about \$20,000 over budget, primarily due to higher Donations. The Annual Fund was \$14,000 over budget due to a very good follow-up fund drive in December and there were \$5,000 of memorial and one-time gifts. 2022 Expenses were adversely impacted by inflation and were about \$13,000 over budget. Seed Sale costs were about \$4,000 over budget due primarily to higher seed costs and Sanctuaries were about \$3,000 over budget due to the cost of special projects and increased billings by Danny Ferguson.

The Net Deficit for the year was about \$69,000, or about \$7,000 better than the budget. The deficit was funded by \$51,000 of withdrawals from the endowment, off budget revenues exceeding off budget expenses by about \$13,500 and \$4,500 from the checking account. Off budget revenues of \$15,000 consisted primarily of \$10,000 of donations from the Rewilding School and the Chappaqua Friends, about \$2,000 of trip profits and a \$2,300 profit on the Annual Dinner.

Tom also noted that the Larry Light Scholarship Fund and the Butterfly Garden Fund were both down about 15% during 2022 due to the poor performance of the stock market. He also congratulated Anne and Debbie for their management of the South Africa trip which, after two years of postponements and changing participants, made a profit of \$2,700.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenstern

This month's third Saturday seed sale will be held at Pruyn Sanctuary on January 21. Seed will be available for purchase and pickup from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM. We are looking for volunteers to staff the sale. Michael, Rick, Phil, Kara and Val signed up.

We did our best to minimize the impact of higher seed prices in 2022 by keeping the prices to our customers as low as possible. We're happy to report that prices for products with sunflower seed have come down since wholesale prices dropped in December.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Anne displayed Jean's quilt, which will be on view at our EagleFest exhibit in the main tent. The quilt will be raffled off as part of our fundraising efforts; board members will be asked to sell raffle tickets. There were several comments expressing appreciation to Jean and noting how beautiful the quilt turned out.

EagleFest is back on this year. The date will be Saturday Feb. 4 with Sunday Feb. 5 as the backup date in case of snow. SMRA will participate with an exhibit in the main tent. We will also host warming tents with displays at the eagle viewing sites at George's Island and the Croton-Harmon boat ramp. Volunteers are requested to staff our three locations and to assist Anne with the walk she will lead. Many thanks to Larry for sponsoring SMRA's warming tent at George's Island. Look for an email with the volunteer signup schedule.

Starting this week (Jan. 12), SMRA volunteers will be censusing Bald Eagles roosting in the vicinity of the Verplanck Steamboat Dock around sunset on Thursdays.

Planning continues for the Annual Meeting of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA), which SMRA will be hosting. Meeting dates are Sept. 22–24, 2023. Board members are invited to join the next planning meeting, scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 19, at 5:00 PM. The zoom link will be sent to the entire board and all are welcome to observe or participate in this next planning meeting.

The NYSOA planning subcommittees have visited the cabins in Croton Point County Park, which could be used to house some out-of-town attendees. The subcommittees have also visited the Sleepy Hollow Conference Center, to evaluate it as a possible meeting venue.

We are considering a spring trip to the Lake Erie shoreline in Ohio. Southbound warblers and other spring migrants concentrate here after crossing the lake. A possible side trip is a visit to Point Pelee National Park in Ontario. This is a concentration point on the lake's north shore for migrants before they make the crossing.

Kathleen reported on the showing of "Wings Over Water," which took place on Jan. 9. The event, which was well attended, was co-hosted by Films on Purpose, SMRA and the Jacob Burns Film Center. Other local Audubon chapters were invited to attend. Following the viewing of this acclaimed 3-D film, there was a panel discussion with the film makers. The evening concluded with a reception hosted by the Jacob Burns Film Center at the Burns Media Arts Lab. Attendees reported that this was a very enjoyable and successful event. Kathleen thanked Kara for photographing the reception.

On Feb. 7 SMRA's Nature Book Club will meet via Zoom to discuss *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau.

On April 23, in an event co-hosted by SMRA and the Chappaqua Library, Kathleen will read from her book of poetry *Feather & Bone* while Anne shows images of birds mentioned in the poems. Kathleen will also provide the background to some of the poems in this program at the library's theater.

The Forest Preschool requested permission to build a small storage shed in the Brinton Brook Sanctuary. The Executive Committee has given its approval and the shed has been constructed.

On January 15, SMRA will participate in NYSOA's annual statewide waterfowl count. We have been assigned coverage of the northern section (Cuomo Bridge to Peekskill) of Westchester's Hudson River shoreline, as well as inland waters, including reservoirs, in the northern part of the County where we will identify and count species of ducks and geese from various shoreline viewpoints.

Waterfowl count totals are used by the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation over the upcoming year to manage waterfowl species. Waterfowl and eagle numbers appear to be very low this year; it is hoped that the waterfowl count will help to document this year's number. The count period is Saturday, January 14 through Sunday, January 22. Board members are welcome to participate; please contact Anne if interested.

Anne has designed new educational programs, which will be presented by her at local libraries as well as other Audubon chapters. For descriptions, visit <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/birding-101>

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

It would be good to hold a Zoom meeting shortly to plan spring programs. Anne will notify the board when this is scheduled.

Consult the SMRA website for upcoming field trips and programs in the January through March time period.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

We are planning a webinar ("Does Your House Kill Birds") for Feb. 16, which will feature experts on this topic, including Dr. Dustin Partridge, NYC Audubon's Director of Conservation and Science. We'll also solicit input from members on creative solutions they have implemented and present them at the webinar. We are also looking to have representatives from state and county government provide updates. It was noted that Audubon New York will be hosting a webinar on this topic on Jan. 18.

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, which has been scheduled for May 10. Anne has recruited Dr. Lawrence Faltz for our program. Dr. Faltz is an expert on light pollution; he has previously done a presentation for Bedford Audubon.

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 is following the situation in which a lawsuit against the school board by the prospective developer is proceeding. The school board has filed a motion to dismiss this lawsuit. Ken reported that the Friends of Buttonhook group is still looking for a response to their offer to purchase the Buttonhook parcel to preserve it as open space. Anne commented that the lawsuit, which challenges the right of the school board to submit an RFP, will probably slow the process down.

Ken asked whether SMRA is still open to considering the offer by the Bilski family to donate approximately 16 acres of their property that is adjacent to the Buttonhook parcel. Ken reported that Tracey Bilski is still open to further discussion. Ken went on to say that the family may want to proceed with the donation to SMRA whether or not the Buttonhook parcel is preserved. Anne explained that a problematic issue is public access to the donated property, especially if the Buttonhook property is developed. Town of New Castle approval would be needed, including a wetlands permit, for the necessary wetland boardwalk crossing from the only current road frontage for this parcel. Because the parcel is in the watershed of the New Croton Reservoir, NYC Department of Environmental Protection approval would also be needed. Both Anne and Ken described the 16-acre parcel as ecologically significant; Anne pointed out that the Bilskis have already created a trail network on the parcel. Ken will ask Tracey Bilski to suggest dates for a meeting with SMRA.

Richard raised the issue of whether the new, strengthened NYS wetland law would affect any access through a wetland to the donated property. Anne responded that the law does not prevent building in a wetland. Rather it expands the scope of where permits are required.

Tom noted that the Advocacy Committee is scheduled to meet via Zoom on Jan. 16.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

The deer hunting season has ended and signs informing sanctuary visitors of the hunt have been removed. Deer harvest numbers were disappointing, with one deer taken in each of the three sanctuaries participating in the SMRA deer management program: Brinton, Choate and Pruyn. The hunters observed that the deer have become more crepuscular and less active during daylight hours when hunting is allowed by state law. It has been suggested that increased sanctuary visitation, especially by dog walkers, may be the cause.

Anne reported that Regeneron has offered to have its employee volunteers help SMRA in our sanctuaries especially during the week of Earth Day. Anne is following up with Regeneron suggesting projects involving both sanctuary trail work and planting of native trees and shrubs in our sanctuaries.

Michael noted that he had written to relatives of the Brinton family in an effort to find out more about the history of the property. There has been a positive response from the daughter of Ruth Brinton Perera; we are expecting to receive a number of historical documents.

To provide additional data for the sanctuary trail assessment walks, Michael is downloading aerial photos from the Westchester County archives. These photos will reveal changing land uses over time as the photos go back almost 100 years. Michael will report the results of this effort at a future board meeting.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim for Jenni Stern

The spring issue deadline is Feb. 1.

New Business—Valerie Lyle

Val called on Anne who reported newly received confirmation that Mariandale Conference Center in Ossining is a likely venue for our April 2 Annual Dinner.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Motion: Valerie to adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Jean Sparacin. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively). Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:28 PM.