

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**February 06, 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 candidates Kara Mason and Mark Magel were also present. Attendance compiled by Rik.  
Absent: Ginger

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 January 11, 2023 as circulated. Motion by: Kathleen Williamson. Seconded by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Val announced that she would be stepping down from her role as president, despite mixed feelings. She thanked board members and Anne for the support shown her during her almost seven years as president. Val will continue on the SMRA board and is looking forward to remaining active in the organization, including serving on the Advocacy Committee.

Erik has been nominated to serve as the next president, with the board and officers' election to take place at our next meeting (March 6, 2023). Val noted that we can expect a smooth transition to the new president.

Our Vice President, Tom Ruth, has also decided to step down from that role, although he will continue on the board of directors. Val expressed her appreciation to Tom for his long service as VP and for his work on the Advocacy Committee, which will continue. Val said she was very pleased to announce that Suzanne will be the nominee for Vice President.

Val reminded the board that our Annual Dinner will take place on April 2. This year's event is a pot luck supper to be held at Mariandale in Ossining.

Some board members have not yet returned their signed Conflict of Interest Statements. Please get this back to the SMRA office as soon as possible.

Val introduced board candidate and former board member Mark Magel. Mark spoke briefly about his background as a Master Gardener and how he was recruited by past president Robert McCrillis to join the board in the early 1990s. Mark said he is very pleased to be rejoining the board and looks forward to serving. He added that he is a sanctuary neighbor, living adjacent to the SMRA Graff Sanctuary. Val noted that Mark's wife, Nina Romanoff, has long been active with SMRA and only recently left the board of directors.

**Nominating Committee—Bill Kellner**

We are planning to hold the election for board members and officers at our March meeting.

The following members of the board of directors' class of 2023 are being nominated to new three-year terms expiring in 2026: Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Suzanne Kavic, Kenneth Novenstern, Richard Saravay, Thomas Ruth, Kathleen Williamson. Mark Magel will run for the slot being vacated by Debbie Van Zyl.

Kara Mason will run for the vacancy in the board of directors' class of 2024.

The following are the nominees for board officers (one-year term):

President: Erik Andersen

Vice President: Suzanne Kavic

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Chair: Valerie Lyle  
Treasurer: Lynn Salmon  
Secretary: William Kellner

Pending results of the board officers' election, the Executive Committee will be:

Erik Andersen  
Suzanne Kavic  
Valerie Lyle  
Lynn Salmon  
Philip Heidelberger  
William Kellner

Candidates for the Audit and Finance Committees will be announced prior to the March 6 meeting of the board of directors.

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

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of February 3, 2023]

With the current 666 SMRA chapter member households and 503 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,169.

2022 was a good year in terms of membership and donations. Tom McE. noted our successful Annual Fund with strong donations continuing through December. Val added that we've had a good level of donations continuing into the new year.

## **Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

For our official quarterly report, 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 and a \$39,380 (3.3%) increase for the fourth quarter. As of January 1, the one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were -13.2%, 4.0% and 5.1% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of -11.1%, 2.3% and 3.2% for the same periods. The balance as of February 1, 2023 was \$1,312,625, which is a \$62,700 (5.0%) increase for the month of January. For the year 2022, there were \$51,880 in withdrawals from and \$44,701 in additions to the portfolio. There have been no withdrawals or additions so far in 2023. As of February 1, 2023, we are \$121,761 (76.6%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Val expressed her appreciation to the Finance Committee for its important work and thanked Phil for his service as committee chair.

## **Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney**

Operating revenue for January exceeded expenses by about \$8,200. Revenues included \$4,000 of donations from the Rewilding School and Chappaqua Friends, \$3,540 received from National Audubon for 2022 dues sharing and about \$8,500 of 2022 Annual Fund donations received in early January. There were no unusual expenses.

For 2022, SMRA had about \$75,000 of credit card revenue and paid about \$3,200 of credit card fees. The 3% credit card fee add-on resulted in SMRA receiving about \$950 to offset the credit card fees. About \$500 was from travel charges and about \$450 was from the voluntary 3% add on fee.

Bill noted that the Amazon Smile program is scheduled to end in February 2023. Tom added that this is a modest source

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of revenue, with SMRA averaging less than \$200 per year through our participation.

Jenni raised the question of whether app-based payment systems, e.g., Venmo or Zelle, could be used for donations and other payments to SMRA. Anne noted that we are already set up with PayPal and looking into additional alternative forms of payment is a good idea.

Val thanked Tom for his long service as Treasurer.

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

EagleFest attendance seemed good despite the bitter cold. Larry noted that his guided Eagle walk had around 80 people. Tom R. reported that things were quite busy at the SMRA exhibit in the main tent, with Jean's Eagle quilt, which is to be raffled off, getting a lot of attention.

Anne thanked Larry, Steve and Rik for braving the cold at George's Island in the early morning before the warming tent was set up (and thanks again to Larry for sponsoring this tent). Anne also thanked the volunteers at the Croton boat ramp, who also endured the morning cold before the tent arrived.

Anne called on Debbie who reported on planning for the New York State Ornithological Association Annual Meeting, which SMRA is hosting. The planning committee (Debbie is chair) has had two meetings so far. Debbie discussed the NYSOA meeting agenda in detail. The dates are September 22–24, 2023. Debbie displayed the spreadsheet of the meeting agenda via Zoom screen share and explained the scheduled meals, workshops, poster sessions, exhibition times and field trips that have been planned so far. The main meeting venue will be the Sleepy Hollow Hotel in Tarrytown. We are still in the active planning phase—let Debbie know if there are any ideas for field trips or other meeting-related events.

Next, Debbie displayed a spreadsheet showing the various committees that are being set up to handle planning for the NYSOA meeting. Committee responsibilities will also include staffing and managing the various meeting events, such as in-person registration. The spreadsheet lists committee names with chairs and suggested backup chairs as well as suggested volunteers for each committee.

Debbie reiterated that this is an all-hands-on-deck event. We are hoping for at least 150 attendees but it is likely there will be over 200 and possibly as many as 300 people registering for the meeting. There will be a meeting on Feb. 15 to go over finances and budgeting for the NYSOA conference. We have not yet finalized what the meeting registration fees will be. Anne noted that we have a record of what was charged for past NYSOA meeting.

Debbie concluded by saying we want to start meeting registration no later than April 1 and that Anne is setting up a website to handle online registration. The website will provide a detailed schedule of meeting events and information about our main hotel venue and other options where meeting attendees could stay. The draft website is <https://www.nybirders.org>

Anne noted that SMRA last hosted a NYSOA Annual Meeting in the early 1990s and added that we are in discussions with David Sibley, as a possible keynote for the 2023 NYSOA meeting. To have Sibley speak would be sure to boost attendance. Anne said we also hope to involve other Audubon chapters in leading field trips. SMRA and other Audubon chapters all stand to benefit from a successful NYSOA conference. Anne thanked the SMRA volunteers who have been working on meeting planning and noted that there is a need for more help. Reach out to Debbie to pitch in and with any ideas. Erik expressed his excitement about SMRA acting as meeting host and thanked Debbie, Anne and all the volunteers for their efforts.

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

There will be a driving trip to various sites in Dutchess County Feb. 7. We hope to see Golden Eagles. SMRA and the Waterman Bird club are co-sponsors.

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Another driving trip, with a lot more driving, will be to the Magee Marsh in Ohio, May 21–25. This is a stopping point for northbound migrants preparing to cross Lake Erie.

The registration page for our April 2 Annual Meeting is up on the SMRA website. We'll hold the raffle for Jean's beautiful Eagle quilt. Board members are reminded to take raffle ticket blanks to sell (or purchase for themselves). Phil asked if there will be any promotion of the Larry Light Scholarship. Anne responded that this would be worked into the program.

Anne called on Kathleen who noted the next meeting (via Zoom) of the SMRA Nature Book Club will be Feb. 7. We will discuss Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

Planning for spring field trips and programs has been underway but we hope to have a Zoom, perhaps in March, to gather additional ideas for the summer and fall.

### **Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth**

Tom began by thanking Val for her service as president, noting that she accomplished a lot and helped grow the organization. He went on to express his appreciation for the support he received from Val during his tenure as vice president and that he is looking forward to working with Erik and Suzanne as they assume their new roles as president and vice president.

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. SMRA member Patrick Harty will participate, reporting on the early work of Project Safe Fight in New York City. We'll also solicit input from members on creative solutions they have implemented and present them at the webinar. We are planning to have representatives from state and county government provide updates. Westchester County Director of Energy & Sustainability Peter McCartt will join us and we are hoping to get State Senator Pete Harckham as well. We'll have a pre-meeting with our presenters on Feb. 8 to finalize planning for the webinar. We'll also discuss the issue of neonicotinoid pesticides and begin planning a future program on this topic. Kara is leading this effort.

Another Advocacy Committee webinar will deal with the problem of artificial outdoor lighting and its impacts on birds, other wildlife, human health and neighborhood aesthetics. This 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 Tracey Bilski, who owns the large parcel adjacent to Buttonhook, would like to meet with SMRA to discuss various options. This will happen at a future date as Tracey is currently focused on the fight to preserve Buttonhook. One question she raised with Ken is whether SMRA would consider managing the Buttonhook property even if it were to be owned by another entity. Anne noted that SMRA has managed properties which it did not own (Brinton Brook under former NAS ownership) and currently at Choate where part of the sanctuary is owned by SMRA and part is owned by the Town of New Castle.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster**

This month's third Saturday seed sale will be Feb 18. Anne displayed a Zoom screen share of the volunteer signup sheet for the sale. Mike, Kathleen, Tom, McE. and Louisa agreed to staff the various shifts. We're looking forward to making a big dent in our remaining inventory.

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

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We have ordered trees from DEC's Saratoga nursery. These will be available for pickup at Lasdon Park in late April. Trees left over from our sanctuary plantings will be available to board members. Species and quantities are as follows:

100 White Spruce  
25 Red Oak  
25 Highbush Cranberry  
100 Ninebark  
25 Black Chokeberry  
25 Winterberry

We are also looking to do additional plantings by applying for a Trees for Tribes grant or the Buffer in a Bag program.

We have received a report from the Lower Hudson Partnership for Invasive Species Management on their efforts to remove the hardy kiwi vine from our Brinton Brook Sanctuary. They spent three days and 81 work hours treating 282 plants. The full report is available from the SMRA office.

Phil asked if volunteers from Regeneron could help with the work funded by SMRA's grant from NAS to make our sanctuary trails more climate-resilient. The grant will cover building water bars to reduce erosion on the trails. It will also help pay for necessary tools. Anne responded that while at this time Regeneron is unable to provide employee volunteers, we are maintaining a relationship with Regeneron and that we have scheduled a SMRA-led bird walk for their employees.

Val expressed her thanks to Michael for all the good work he is doing for the SMRA sanctuaries.

### **Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The spring issue deadline is NOW. We will include bios of our new board member candidates. Kara has submitted an article on neonicotinoid pesticides, which we also hope to run. The issue will come out in early March. Anne added that we will have an item about the NYSOA conference.

### **New Business—Valerie Lyle**

Cary let the board know that SMRA's annual fundraising Birding Tea is scheduled for June 17 and that Croton's Earth Day event will be held Senasqua Park on Apr 19. (Date was corrected to April 29 after the meeting.) We plan to have a SMRA exhibit at Earth Day, so we'll need a few volunteers. Michael added that we're also looking to do a meadow planting at Brinton Brook Sanctuary on April 29.

### **Adjournment—Valerie Lyle**

Motion: Valerie shall adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Ken Novenstern. Seconded by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Val adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.