

Saw Mill River Audubon
September 11, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting held on Zoom

Present (in **bold type**): **Erik Andersen, Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin**, Louisa Gagliardi, **Mitchell Goldfarb**, Philip Heidelberger, **Suzanne Kavic, Michael Madias, Jr., Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, William Kellner, Valerie Lyle, Tom McEnerney, Mark Magel**, Kara Mason, **Kenneth Novenster, Steve Rappaport**, Tom Ruth, **Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Jennifer Stern, Larry Trachtenberg**, Kathleen Williamson. Executive Director **Anne Swaim** was also present.

Absent: Louisa, Phil, Kara, Tom R., Kathleen

Meeting started at 7:01 PM.

President's Report—Erik Andersen

Erik noted that a quorum was present.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on June 5, 2023 as circulated. Motion by: Valerie Lyle. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the proposed dates listed on tonight's printed agenda for meetings of the board of directors for the remainder of 2023 and the first half of 2024, noting that the Oct. 2 meeting will most likely be held via Zoom as the Croton Library is not available. While the Croton Point Nature Center would be available for the board to meet in person, the consensus of the Executive Committee is that the cramped quarters of the Nature Center make it an unsafe venue in light of an uptick in Covid cases.

Anne noted that the date of the Annual Dinner has been changed to March 24. Val asked if we should schedule a board meeting for April. Erik said we will follow up on the question of March and April meeting dates at the October board meeting.

Development Committee Report—Erik Andersen

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of September 7, 2023.]

With the current 693 SMRA chapter member households and 477 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,170. Anne noted that while the number of joint NAS/SMRA member households has seen a slow decline, SMRA chapter membership has been increasing. This is a net positive for the organization.

Year-to-date dues payments received are \$3,750. The budgeted goal for 2023 is \$8,400 for dues payments.

Finance Committee—Bill Kellner for Phil Heidelberger

For our official quarterly report, as of July 1, 2023, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,344,489, a 7.6% (\$94,564) increase above the January 1, 2023 balance of \$1,249,925. As of July 1, the year-to-date, one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were 8.9%, 10.6%, 7.7% and 6.5% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 6.2%, 7.2%, 5.5% and 4.5% for the same periods. More recently, the balance as of September 1, 2023 was \$1,351,138 which is a 0.5% (\$6,649) increase since July 1st and an 8.1% (\$101,213) increase YTD. As of September 1, 2023, there were \$17,035 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio YTD. As of September 1, 2023, we are 111.3% (\$177,051) above

our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. This high ratio is partly due to a higher than usual checking account balance which includes revenue for the New York State Birders Conference and the Trinidad trip that have been received but for which the corresponding payments have not yet been made.

Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon

[Reference report: Operating Revenues & Expenses Year-to-Date: 01/01/23–09/05/23]

Lynn reported that revenues and expenses are closely tracking budgeted amounts. Newsletter expenses are higher than budgeted due to increases in printing and postage costs. The NYSOA Conference currently has approximately a \$4,400 net surplus when expenses to date are subtracted from revenues received. The relatively high checking account balance will soon return to more normal level as we are preparing to pay a number of outstanding bills on line items for which revenues have been received.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

On Sept. 17 SMRA and the Chappaqua Library were co-sponsors of a public program held at the library that featured author Michael Ingles discussing his book *Woods and Water*, which explores the flora and fauna of Nanny Hagen Brook in Thornwood over the course of a year. The program was well-received; about 65 people attended.

SMRA's successful partnership with the Rewilding School has received some positive mentions in the local press. See the school's Facebook page.

Anne discussed ongoing planning for the upcoming NYSOA New York Birders Conference, which SMRA is hosting Sept. 22–24. We are currently at 328 registrants, which is a record high number for the NYSOA annual conference. The bulk of these registrants are from Westchester County (121), other lower Hudson Valley counties (46), New York City (42) and Long Island (15). Only 88 registrants are from farther upstate, which may, in part, account for the fact that only 87 hotel rooms have been reserved in the conference room block. SMRA will need to cover 13 unused rooms but, as Tom pointed out, we should not be charged if the hotel is able to fill these rooms.

Revenue received to date for the conference stands at \$76,548. Net income is \$5,035 after conference expenses to date of \$71,513 are subtracted. Maximum exposure on the unrented rooms is \$4,394, which would leave a surplus of at least \$641. Our positive cash flow has enabled us to provide food items for the Friday evening cash bar event (6:30 PM).

At the Saturday night banquet, Erik will welcome conference attendees on behalf of Saw Mill River Audubon following opening remarks from NYSOA's president. Then, after NYSOA awards and recognitions and announcement of raffle and silent auction winners, David Sibley will give the keynote address.

Registrations for NYSOA conference workshops have been brisk; all scheduled workshops have been filled. Registrations are also looking good for the 16 field trips we have planned. The six workshops for which maximum numbers of participants have been set are full and we expect good numbers for the the remaining workshops.

Our volunteers have done great work. Special thanks to Cary for lining up vendors for the conference. Cary, Kara, Kathleen and Lynn, among others, have worked hard to set up what should be a successful raffle and silent auction. Donations of binoculars and other items are much appreciated. Also, we are very pleased that our keynote speaker, David Sibley, will make time to meet with young birders attending the conference.

We have hired a per diem educator, Cathy Hildenbrand, to replace Pat Mutolo. Cathy, who has done extensive volunteer work in the Chappaqua Schools, has a background in video production. She'll work this fall with Anne at Rockefeller State Park Preserve on programs for students from the Ossining Schools District. We're also considering hiring a third part-time educator.

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

Anne reported that the upcoming trip to Trinidad has reached its registration limit of 20. As there has been a subsequent cancellation, a slot for one (or two, if needed) is available. Debbie has signed on as a co-leader of the trip. We'll be staying at the famous Asa Wright Nature Center in the forested Arima Valley in the island's Northern Range.

SMRA Nature Book Club—Bill Kellner for Kathleen Williamson

On October 18 the club will meet via Zoom to discuss *The Sea Trilogy* by Rachel Carson. Participants may choose to read one or more of the works in the trilogy: *Under the Sea-Wind*, *The Sea Around Us* or *The Edge of the Sea*. Bill urged board members who have not yet participated in the club to consider giving it a try. We've read a number of mind-expanding works and our discussions are always stimulating.

Advocacy Committee Report—William Kellner for Tom Ruth

Over the summer we hosted a Webinar with Pete Salmansohn on the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, a grade-separated pedestrian path projected to run from Cold Spring to Beacon. Another webinar is planned on the topic of neonicotinoid pesticides for November 9.

The Advocacy Committee will meet in early October to discuss and plan appropriate actions on environmental issues, including challenges facing Red Knots and the horseshoe crabs they depend on during their long-distance migration, the Clean Path NY Project, to build infrastructure that will support moving clean electricity from where it's generated upstate to where it's needed in the New York City metropolitan area, and others.

Ken spoke and reported that the Advocacy Committee recommended that SMRA join the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition (HCRC). The HCRC is working to stem declines in the horseshoe crab population. Eggs from spawning crabs are a critical resource in the long-distance migration of the Red Knot. The crabs face challenges from over-harvesting and use of their blood by the pharmaceutical industry for medical assays. While crabs are returned to the wild after blood is drawn, mortality is significant. The HCRC is working to have a synthetic substitute for horseshoe crab blood get FDA approval.

Motion: SMRA shall join the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition. Motion by: Ken Novenster. Seconded by: William Kellner. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

We'll be looking to sign up volunteers for our upcoming Seed Sale day, which is Oct. 7 (9:30 AM–12:30 pm).

Pruyn Garden Update—Mark Magel

Mark reported that the Pruy gardeners have done well this season. We participated in the pollinator gardens tour on June 25; about 50 people visited our gardens. For the most part, these were actively interested visitors, looking to learn how to improve their own gardens.

Throughout the garden season we have been assisted by a dedicated cadre of volunteers who deserve our

thanks. Our next volunteer gathering will be Sept. 13 at which time we'll begin the process of mapping the gardens to see what's come up and what hasn't.

In terms of budget, we're pleased that we've spent less than what was allocated in the budget. One possibility is to use remaining funds to purchase replacement trees for those that have died, perhaps some white oaks, which host a broad array of beneficial insects. We're also looking at purchasing garden stakes to support our larger grasses. Erik raised the general question of how SMRA deals with reallocation of budget surpluses. Tom replied that the standard we've used is what is reasonable in terms of how closely the proposed reuse relates to the original allocation.

Anne noted that we are preparing signs to stop garden visitors from foraging. Our native paw paws have been the biggest problem, with visitors removing fallen paw paw fruits.

Mark continued, saying that by planting natives, the gardens' water requirements have been reduced. Reduced growth of weeds is an added benefit.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

Michael reported significant trail improvements have been accomplished at the Brinton Brook, Graff and Pruyn Sanctuaries. We did a trail reroute at Graff and blazed it. We installed water bars at Brinton Brook and Pruyn. The new water bars did a good job of handling the very heavy rains we experienced this summer. At Brinton, we plan to update the blaze colors on the green and blues trails to match the NY/NJ Trail Conference standards.

Our sanctuary walk that was a part of the recent Hudson Valley Ramble was not well attended this year. However, the three people who showed up at Brinton Brook last Saturday had an enjoyable and educational experience.

We received a Trail Walker Report about an infestation of spotted lantern flies on ailanthus trees in Brinton Brook Sanctuary. Michael confirmed the infestation and did some spraying with a vinegar solution. Anne noted that the latest scientific research is that control measures at this point are probably futile and, in fact, may do more harm than good. The good news is that there are some indications that natural predation of spotted lantern flies is increasing and may help control the infestation.

Anne continued, giving the board an update on the serious situation of a Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor who has been accused by the Town of New Castle of cutting down over 500 trees without a permit. This is a violation of the Town's tree ordinance. A number of the stumps, trunks and branches were pushed onto sanctuary property, some of which is owned by SMRA and some by the Town. Additional violations by this neighbor are being pursued by the Town. These include illegal dumping of untested fill on his property, some of which has ended up on sanctuary property.

SMRA is considering how to have the damage to Pruyn Sanctuary remediated as the Town's case against the property owner proceeds through Town Court. Anne and Suzanne have been following the court case. Anne, Erik, Suzanne and other board members have inspected the site where the damage has occurred in Pruyn Sanctuary. Steve has moved our trail cams, positioning them so that we can have ongoing monitoring of the site. Anne and Erik met on site with a representative of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Unfortunately, it does not appear likely the

DEP will pursue additional enforcement actions beyond what the Town is doing. Ken and Larry are looking into the possibility of SMRA retaining legal counsel. The board will be kept informed about future developments in this matter.

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

The deadline for the winter issue is Nov. 1. Look for good coverage of the NYSOA conference in the issue.

New Business—Erik Andersen

Erik called on Anne, who reminded the board that there would not be a board meeting in November. Instead, board committees will meet during that month.

Adjournment—Erik Andersen

Motion: Erik shall adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Larry Trachtenberg. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:34 PM.