

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**January 8, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)**  
**Meeting was held on Zoom**

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

Absent: Ken Novenstern, Steve Rappaport

The meeting started at 7:02 PM.

**President's Report—Erik Andersen**

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on December 4, 2023, and as circulated. Motion by: Tom Ruth. Seconded by: Jenni Stern. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the dates of future board meetings listed on tonight's meeting agenda. Valerie said she would confirm with the Croton Free Library that we are on the schedule to use the library's meeting room for our April 15 and May 6 meetings. Erik also noted that our annual dinner, which will be a potluck, is listed on the agenda for the board of directors meeting. The date is March 24.

Erik urged board members who have not yet done so to PS and mail their follow-up fundraising letters. He also requested that all board members fill out and sign the Conflict of Interest Statement that was distributed as an email attachment with the materials for tonight's meeting. These may be emailed to the SMRA office; another option is to print the statement and mail it to the office.

Erik thanked the board for the many accomplishments achieved in 2023, including the highly successful NYSOA Conference and managing the SMRA response to the Pruyn Sanctuary boundary issue. Erik complimented the board for its positive attitude and democratic spirit that allows SMRA to accomplish its mission. Special thanks are due to the Finance Committee, chaired by Phil, which so ably executed a complex rebalancing of our portfolio.

Erik also thanked Anne for her efforts to grow our membership

**Development Committee Report—Erik Andersen**

[Reference Membership Report as of January 8, 2024.]

With the current 666 SMRA chapter member households and 461 joint NAS/SMRA member households, the total membership stands at 1,127.

Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships collected in 2023 totaled \$9,459.

### **Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

As of January 1, 2024, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,358,054, an 8.7% (\$108,129) increase above the January 1, 2023 balance of \$1,249,925, and a 4.3% (\$55,769) increase for the month of December. There were \$65,035 in withdrawals from the portfolio during 2023, which was \$6,043 above the 5% target level of \$58,991 but \$14,380 below the \$79,415 budgeted withdrawal. As of January 1, 2024, we are \$83,319 (50.1%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

### **Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon**

[Reference report: SMRA Operating Revenues and Expenses, Year-to-Date 1/1/23–12/31/23]

Lynn reported that donation revenues exceeded expectations with year-end annual fund donations topping \$74,000. Other donation types (matching grants, trip donations, credit card fees) were similar to last year.

Although seed sale revenue of \$22,483 was less than last year's \$26,766, expenses were also down and the net from seed sales this year of \$9,188 was almost the same as last year's net of \$8,966.

We've had many year-end membership renewals along with end-of-year donations. We received the NAS membership payment on time in December this year.

All other revenues are in line with budgeted amounts. However, we had some large end-of-year expenses that led to a larger endowment transfer this year than last year. This included over \$20,000 for the new Pruyun Roof and expenses for the Pruyun Boundary issue.

Otherwise, most expenses for the year were in line with budgeted amounts. Office Operations expenses include the purchase of a new laptop and projector. We haven't received the bill for our annual audit, which is still being finalized.

Net trip revenues are shown at the bottom of page 2 (all positive). In December, we collected deposits for the three upcoming 2024 trips; all of them are full or nearly full.

Total cash flow for the year shows a positive \$7,800. This does not include payment for auditing services rendered in 2023, which has yet to be made. Note that the NY Birder's Conference numbers are not included in the Operating Revenues and Expenses Report.

### **Pruyn House Committee—Ginger Bernardin**

As discussed at the previous board meeting, the roofing job at SMRA's Pruyun Sanctuary headquarters building has been completed, as has tiling work in the upstairs bathroom and the installation of a new vanity. Upcoming work includes painting the bedroom in the upstairs residence and fixing the flooring in the kitchen.

Anne noted that a recent power outage provided a first test for the generator. It worked without a hitch.

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

Anne updated the board on the issue of the Pruyun Sanctuary neighbor who is being prosecuted by the Town of New Castle for various environmental law violations. SMRA's attorney Perry Freedman has filed a civil complaint against the neighbor for damage to SMRA's property. The nature of the damage is clearly laid out in the

complaint. We have hired an arborist to assess damage to trees on sanctuary property caused by the neighbor's actions; we are awaiting a report from the arborist.

The Chappaqua Friends Nursery School's Forest Preschool will again be held in January and February at Pruyn Sanctuary with a donation given to SMRA as well as an insurance certificate sent to us. They will park, enter, and exit at the Birchwood Swim and Tennis Club.

SMRA will continue its significant presence at Teatown's EagleFest this year by helping to underwrite the cost of warming tents at the Croton River boat ramp and George's Island County Park with SMRA volunteers to help people spot eagles at both locations plus an exhibit booth in the main tent in Croton Point County Park. The date is February 3 (snow date: Feb. 4). Anne displayed a volunteer signup sheet on Zoom screen share. The signup sheet was also distributed to board members with tonight's meeting materials. Board members volunteered for the various time slots at each of the above-mentioned venues, although a few vacancies remained. The filled-in signup sheet will be distributed by email to the board.

### **Program's and Field Trips—Anne Swaim**

Upcoming programs include (for more details see the event calendar on the SMRA website):

- January 31—Zoom program co-hosted with Central Westchester Audubon and featuring Jennifer Lodi-Smith, Ph.D. of Canisius University who will tell us about the Spark Bird Project.
- February 8—Zoom program on Merlin Bird ID with a focus on birds you may find during the 2024 Great Backyard Bird Count. The program will feature a quiz with expert birders, testing their knowledge against Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin app. The Great Backyard Bird Count (<https://www.birdcount.org/>) is held each year over President's Day weekend: February 16-19, 2024.
- February 29—Zoom program with Deborah Cramer, author of *The Narrow Edge*, a book about the epic migration of the Red Knot and the dependence of this bird on the horseshoe crab. Kathleen noted that the book will be discussed at the next session of the SMRA Nature Book Club on Feb. 6.
- Upcoming trips to Texas (March 11–15) and Yellowstone (May 15–21) are fully subscribed. There is one vacancy on the trip to northern Minnesota (Feb. 15–20).
- Upcoming local and regional field trips ([www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips))
  - January 25—late afternoon to evening trip to Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge to view a variety of raptors, and, as the sun goes down, Short-eared Owls from your vehicle or a short walk.
  - February 10—Eagle watch at Lyndhurst in Tarrytown.
  - March 19—Woodcock Walk with Charlie Roberto at Croton Point County Park.

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

Tom, noting that Governor Hochul had signed the Birds and Bee Protection Act (see minutes of Dec. 4 board meeting), expressed his appreciation to Kara for her passion on this issue and for leading SMRA's advocacy effort in this fight. Erik spoke, thanking the Advocacy Committee and Anne as well for this important effort. Tom noted that there were some last-minute changes to the bill, which the Advocacy Committee will review in its next meeting. Richard suggested that the next issue of the newsletter feature an article on the implementation of the new law and what individuals can do now so that the use of neonicotinoid pesticides does not continue.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim for Ken Novenstern**

We have two unfilled volunteer slots for our upcoming seed sale on January 20 (10:00 am–12 noon). Michael and Kathleen agreed to fill these slots. We're continuing to sell bird seed, but a mild winter (so far) has slowed sales.

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

Our yearly deer management program in our sanctuaries ended on December 31, 2023, with the conclusion of the state-sanctioned bow hunting season in Westchester County. Five deer were harvested, three at Brinton Brook, two at Pruyn, and none at Choate. Michael suggested that SMRA apply for deer removal nuisance permits so that the deer management program could be continued into January, starting in January 2025. A brief discussion followed.

Motion: To approve making an application to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for deer removal nuisance permits for SMRA's Brinton Brook, Pruyn, and Choate Sanctuaries for January 2025. Motion by: Suzanne Kavic. Seconded by: Michael Madias, Jr. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Michael continued, saying our sanctuary trails have become quite muddy in several spots because of excessive rain this fall and winter. We plan to evaluate the placement of water bars to see if more should be added and to look at other possible steps to mitigate drainage issues. Anne noted that it's been so wet that we are seeing water running off the landscape in places where it has never been seen. Anne also said that a visitor to Pruyn Sanctuary complimented SMRA on the excellent placement of water bars on the trails, which keeps the trails in good shape and enhances the walking experience.

### **Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The deadline for the spring issue is Feb. 1. This will be the first issue produced for primary distribution as a digital file. A PDF file of the newsletter will be emailed to members. Other distribution methods for the digital newsletter are being explored. SMRA members will have the option to opt in to continue to receive a printed copy. Up to 300 printed copies will be produced in the office.

### **New Business—Erik Andersen**

Cary asked for assistance in setting a date for the spring (or early summer) fundraising birding tea that she will host at her home. This will allow the event to be promoted in the upcoming newsletter. She would like to have packets of native wildflower seeds for distribution at the tea. She also suggested distributing seed packets at the upcoming SMRA Annual Dinner on March 24. Michael will help with this. Mark noted that the Pruyn Garden Committee will be dividing native plants for replanting during the month of April.

### **Adjournment—Erik Andersen**

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:02 PM.