

## **Saw Mill River Audubon**

**February 5, 2024, Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner; attendance compiled by Rik Kaufman)  
Meeting 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: Mark, Kara, Jean, Larry

The meeting started at 7:01 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 January 8, 2024 and as circulated.  
Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Valerie Lyle. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

There will be a special board meeting to be conducted on Zoom on March 4. This meeting is being added to the schedule so that we may conduct the annual election of the board of directors and of board officers. It will also allow us to finalize plans with the board for the March 24 Annual Dinner.

The annual audit for 2022 has not been closed out. While our auditors filed the IRS form 990 on time, the tax return for New York State has not yet been filed. This delay in finishing the audit and filing of a required tax return points to the need to search for new auditors. We are planning to do a request for a proposal; this will be reviewed by the Audit Committee. In the meantime, if any board members have leads for possible auditor candidates, please forward them to Erik or Tom McEnerney.

Erik reminded board members of the beautiful quilt "Forest Friends" designed and produced by Patricia Loquet for our 2024 bird quilt raffle. Noting that sales to date have been limited and that the raffle will take place at the Annual Dinner on March 24, Erik asked board members to actively sell tickets.

Board members who have not yet done so need to fill out and sign the Conflict of Interest Statement that was distributed as an email attachment with the materials for the January 8 board of directors meeting. These may be emailed to the SMRA office; another option is to print the statement and mail it to the office.

Our membership with the Pro Bono Legal Partnership, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that matches nonprofits with appropriate pro bono legal counsel, has expired. A telephone meeting with the partnership has been scheduled for Feb. 6 with Erik, Tom McEnerney, and Anne. The goal is to have SMRA's membership reinstated.

### **Development Committee Report—Erik Andersen**

[Reference Membership Report as of February 2, 2024.]

With the current 664 SMRA chapter member households and 469 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,133.

Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2024 stands at \$734.65.

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

For our official quarterly report, 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. As of January 1, the one-year, three-year, five-year, and ten-year investment rates of return were 14.1%, 4.1%, 8.8%, and 6.5% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 10.6%, 2.9%, 6.6% and 4.6% for the same periods. More recently, the balance as of February 1, 2024 was \$1,361,160 which is a 0.2% (\$3,106) increase for the month of January. During 2023 there were \$65,035 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio. As of January 1, 2024, we are 50.1% (\$83,319) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking, short-term CDs and money market funds.

The Garden Fund Endowment balance is currently approximately \$52,000 and, according to our 5% three-year moving average withdrawal rule, could support about \$2,400 in withdrawals for 2024. This money has traditionally gone to support the Butterfly Garden, however last year only \$345 was withdrawn and Mark Magel expects a similar withdrawal for 2024, so we are proposing to expand the use of these funds to support more general garden and arboretum expenses including the native plant garden, plantings around Pruyn house and the arboretum and meadow. When the original \$20,000 donation from Turner Construction was made in 2010, SMRA's intent was to limit the proceeds to the maintenance of the Butterfly Garden, however, the check from Turner Construction stated it was for "Endowment for Pruyn Sanctuary." This was discussed at the most recent Finance Committee meeting and the committee voted to expand the use of the funds and to recommend this to the board for its approval.

Motion: Proceeds from the Garden Fund endowment shall be used for maintenance and improvement of the currently existing gardens as well as the arboretum and plantings near Pruyn House. Motion by: Philip Heidelberger. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

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

[Reference report: SMRA Operating Revenues and Expenses, Year-to-Date 1/1/2024–1/31/2024]

Fundraising revenues were up in January. Notable additions include sizable employer matching grant and trip donations from payments for our upcoming winter SMRA trips to Minnesota and Texas.

Seed sales also had a robust January, similar to last year at this time.

Membership amounts were on track with budgeted expectations, with 54 membership renewals received by us in January. About half of these were done on the last 2–3 days of December and money received Jan. 3.

Expenses were what we expected for January. Pruyn house numbers include winter heating oil costs. And, our largest expense in Programs and Field Trips, EagleFest, was paid this month.

Three winter trips together are bundled for this report; they will be separated after they take place. The bottom line, we received more than we spent in January, but that will reverse in February as we pay for everything scheduled/budgeted in the first quarter.

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

Anne updated the board on the issue of the Pruyn 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 com-

plaint against the neighbor for damage to SMRA's property. The neighbor's motion to dismiss the action taken by the Town has been dismissed; trial dates have been set for April 29 and April 30. SMRA's civil complaint filing is a publicly available record. The *Westfair Business Journal* has run an article with the details of SMRA's complaint.

Larry, along with Kyle Bardwell and Sean Camillieri with Anne Swaim attended the Annual Kickoff Conference of the New York Young Birders Club on January 21. This successful event was sponsored by SMRA. We are a NYSYBC partner organization. It was held at the Mariandale Conference Center in Ossining.

SMRA continued its significant presence at Teatown's EagleFest this year (held Feb. 3) by providing warming tents at the Croton River boat ramp and George's Island County Park, and an exhibit booth in the main tent in Croton Point County Park. Twenty-three SMRA volunteers staffed our exhibit in the main tent—15 board members and eight non-board members.

While attendance may not have quite reached pre-pandemic levels, EagleFest was very well attended. Our table was once again a designated stop for Teatown's EagleFest Passport activity, which increased enthusiasm and attendance at our booth. Kathleen said the vibe at the exhibit booth was very positive. She noted having SMRA postcards with a QR code was helpful. Valerie added that we were able to collect email addresses from many of the people who stopped by the booth.

Anne thanked Steve, Larry and Rik for staffing the SMRA warming tent at George's Island County Park and also the volunteers at the Croton Boat ramp tent. Both sites had a steady stream of visitors, most of whom were able to view Bald Eagles.

Anne thanked Cary for her excellent presentation at EagleFest on ways to reduce bird collisions with windows and buildings. Anne said her presentation on bird-friendly backyards was helped by Michael who provided seeds of native plants, handed out to attendees. This was a big hit.

Bird walks led by Larry and Anne were extremely popular (perhaps too popular), with about 100 attendees joining Larry and 80 with Anne.

On March 1, the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County and the Pace University School of Law will host a conference "Community Climate Change—Accelerating Awareness, Engagement, and Action" at the law school. Check the FCWC website for more information.

SMRA will have a booth again at the Croton Earth Day event on April 27.

Despite ongoing publicity, including outreach to the New York Young Birders Club, we have only received one application for our Larry Light Scholarship award. This is from a New Hampshire high school student asking for \$1,500 to pay part of the tuition for this summer's Washington Youth Summit on the Environment. Anne and Erik said this was a strong application from a promising, committed student. Anne noted that if we approved this application, we would still have adequate funding under the scholarship endowment guidelines to fund additional awards, adding that New York State Department of Environmental Conservation youth camps have relatively modest tuition; scholarships could cover tuition for up to two attendees. Total annual funds distributable as scholarship awards are approximately \$2,400 under the guidelines.

Motion: To approve the Larry Light Scholarship application by Taylor Huse for \$1,500 to cover part of the tuition for the 2024 Washington Youth Summit on the Environment. Motion by: Erik Andersen. Seconded by: Kathleen Williamson. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

On Feb. 6 Anne will present a Birding 101 program via Zoom for the Larchmont Public Library.

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

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

\*February 8—Zoom program on Merlin Bird ID with focus on birds you may find during 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.

\*February 10—Eagle watch at Lyndhurst in Tarrytown.

\*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.

Anne noted that SMRA's Zoom account is currently limited to 100 participants. As the above Zoom programs have the potential to exceed that limit, we will upgrade the account to 300 seats to ensure we have space for all who want to attend. We will also upgrade the number of tickets available per event on our Eventbrite account.

The upcoming trip to Texas (March 11–15) is fully subscribed. We're looking forward to birding with our guide Tiffany Kersten, who is well-known in the Rio Grande Valley. There is one vacancy on the trip to northern Minnesota (Feb. 15–20) and one room available on the Yellowstone trip (May 15–21). We're planning a fall trip to Panama (Nov. 15–23); this trip is also almost fully subscribed but we have one room still available.

We will shortly be asking for volunteers to help with setup and cleanup at the upcoming Annual Dinner (March 24). We're excited about our keynote speaker, Heather Wolf of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Heather will be discussing her book *Birding at the Bridge: In Search of Every Bird on the Brooklyn Waterfront*.

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

At the Advocacy Committee meeting held last month, we discussed the Birds and Bees Act that Governor Hochul signed into law in December. Last-minute modifications to the law delayed the implementation calendar of some of the bill's provisions. It's incumbent on homeowners and landscape companies to be aware that some products containing harmful neonicotinoid pesticides will still be available until the various provisions of the law kick in. Seeds coated with neonicotinoids will be available through 2026, for example. These seeds must be dyed a bright color, which should alert potential users to avoid them.

We're looking forward to the Zoom program with Deborah Cramer (see Programs and Field Trips above). The Advocacy Committee has been monitoring the search for a synthetic substitute for horseshoe crab blood, which is used in the pharmaceutical industry to assess vaccine and assay safety, among other things. Conservation groups want the U.S. Pharmacopeia to approve a synthetic substitute with no extra testing or validation. Anne has arranged for SMRA's participation in the Jamaica Bay horseshoe crab census to be conducted on June 21.

Tom discussed the ongoing issue of managing the Croton Point Park landfill grassland habitat. Anne, along with Karalyn Lamb and Charlie Roberto met in November with the County Parks Dept. and a representative from the County Soil and Water District. The County has agreed to allow SMRA to review management plans for this key habitat. Anne noted that Croton Point has a new park manager who seems well-versed about the key environmental issues affecting the park.

The next Advocacy Committee is scheduled for March 21.

**Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster**

We have two unfilled volunteer slots for our upcoming seed sale on February 17 (10:00 AM–noon). Valerie and Michael agreed to fill these slots. Ken queried Anne about the remaining seed inventory. Anne replied that the online inventory form shows what varieties are still available. She noted that inventory in the shed is quite limited and we have sold out some kinds of seeds and are close to selling out others

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

Our sanctuary trails have been impacted by the heavy precipitation in 2023 and January 2024. There are quite a few muddy spots, as would be expected. Our next planning will be for the low areas adding some more puncheon walkways, rock crossing or, as needed, re-routing trails away from low, wet areas.

The Rewilding School is undertaking a project to make nesting boxes for Wood Ducks. The boxes will be placed in the vicinity of the pond in the Brinton Brook Sanctuary.

**Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The deadline for the spring issue was Feb. 1; the issue is currently in final production. This will be the first issue to be distributed primarily as a digital file. 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. Anne noted that about one-third of members had previously opted to receive a digital instead of printed copy of the newsletter. In answer to a question from a board member about the number of SMRA members for whom we do not have an email address, Anne said that these 250+ members will receive a printed copy of the current issue by mail. They will be asked to either provide an email address to receive future issues digitally, or, if they want to continue to receive a printed copy, they will have to confirm that choice.

**New Business—Erik Andersen**

Erik asked if any board members or the Executive Director had any new business. There being no response, he called for a motion to adjourn.

**Adjournment—Erik Andersen**

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:11 PM.