

Saw Mill River Audubon
April 15, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting held at the Croton Free Library, Croton-on-Hudson, NY

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: Cary, Suzanne, Richard, Jenni

Meeting started at 7:07 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 March 4, 2024 and as circulated.
Motion by: Kathleen Williamson. Seconded by: Tom Ruth. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Referring to SMRA's 2024 annual dinner, which was held on March 24, Erik said the gathering was a great success. We had record attendance, with 99 people filling the venue at the Mariandale Conference Center. There were entertaining and informative presentations from our 2023 Larry Light Scholarship recipient about her adventures at Audubon's Hog Island Camp and our keynote speaker, Heather Wolf, author of *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds Wherever You Are*. Erik thanked the volunteers and Anne, whose work planning and setting up helped make this such a wonderful evening.

A special thank you was extended to Patricia Loquet, creator of the beautiful quilt, "Forest Friends," for our annual fundraising quilt raffle. The winner was announced at the annual dinner. Larry told the board that Patricia received an email from the winner of the quilt raffle describing how much he loved the quilt. The winning ticket was sold to a New Jersey resident who visited the SMRA exhibit at EagleFest.

An updated list of SMRA Committee members is included with tonight's meeting handouts. Note that there has been some shifting of personnel on several committees. We are trying to revitalize committees that have been inactive since COVID. Please let Anne know if any changes should be made to individual assignments.

Our annual audit for 2023 has finally been completed and the required filings submitted. We are preparing a request for proposal (RFP) to consider hiring a different firm to handle our yearly audits; the RFP will be sent to our current auditors as well as to up to four prospective replacements. Tom McEnerney noted that, under the NYS nonprofit regulations, an annual audit or an audit review is required. While we have been getting annual audits from our auditors, we will consider getting an audit review in the future. An audit review relies on the client vouching for the accuracy of the data submitted; costs may be less than for a full audit. Erik noted that in the RFP, our current and prospective new auditors will be asked about the possibility of doing an audit review instead of a full audit. The RFP will request quotes for a three-year engagement with our auditors; there will be an option to terminate the relationship before the full three years. Erik thanked Mitch for accepting the chairmanship of the Audit Committee.

The June meeting of the SMRA board of directors will be held at our annual picnic, on June 3 at 5:30 PM at Senasqua Park, Croton-on-Hudson. Val has secured the required permit from the Village. Board members are asked to let Anne know if there are any SMRA members that they would like to see invited since this is a gathering of both the board and other SMRA volunteers.

Fundraising and Development Committee Report—Anne Swaim for Suzanne Kavic

[Reference Membership Report as of April 12, 2024.]

With the current 616 SMRA chapter member households and 478 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,094.

Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2024 stands at \$2,542.20.

Anne noted that instructions for the 2024 Annual Appeal were included in tonight's meeting packet. These instructions will also be sent to each board member by email, along with personalized lists of people assigned to each board member for personalizing the mailings. Board members are being asked to make corrections to their personalized lists and to submit any new prospects they have. The list of unassigned people who will get the annual appeal will also be a part of the upcoming email; board members may choose people from the unassigned list to PS the fundraising letter. Note the timeline on the back of the instruction sheet. The deadline to return board member individual lists along with any changes is April 22. Packets of letters and supplies will be available for pickup at the May 6 board of directors meeting or available at the PS'ing party. See more about that below.

Anne asked for a discussion about whether letters should be personalized at home or at a special gathering of the board, our annual "PS'ing Party." As the board was divided on their preferences, Anne said that the PS Party would be held at the Nature Center in Croton Point Park on the evening of May 13; pizza will be served. Those who are unable or would rather not attend are free to complete their personalized fundraising letters at home and will receive their packets at the May 6 board of directors meeting.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of April 1, 2024, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,440,568, a 2.3% (\$32,400) increase for the month of March and a 6.1% (\$82,514) increase above the January 1, 2024 balance of \$1,358,054. There have been no additions to and \$8,000 of withdrawals from the endowment so far during 2024. As of April 1, 2024, we are 47.7% (\$79,196) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking, short-term CDs and money market funds.

Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon

[Reference report: SMRA Operating Revenues and Expenses, Year-to-Date 1/1/2024–4/1/2024]

Fundraising revenues are above budget amounts for the first quarter largely due to timing of donations (\$7,200 received to date) for three trips taking place February–May this year. We also received a large matching grant (\$3,000) in January for a donation made in 2023.

Other revenues are as expected for this time of year. And, note that an endowment transfer of \$8,000 was made on April 4, a couple of days after this report was prepared. In 2023, an endowment transfer was done approximately one month earlier.

Looking at expenses, most categories are on track when compared to the budget or numbers from last year.

Pruyn House expenses may look a bit high, but a large chunk of that is from paying annual property taxes (\$3,762) on Mar 31 (in 2023 property taxes were on Apr 2). And heating oil (\$2,760) and snow plowing (\$1,115) expenses paid in January through March should not be needed again for several months.

And, as expected, we are saving printing and postage costs by “going green” and primarily distributing the bulletin electronically.

Other Revenues and Expenses paid in the first quarter include the 2023 audit which is now finished. There has been an additional \$5,000 added to the legal retainer for the Pruyn boundary issue, and we have paid for two Larry Light Youth Scholarships this year.

The Minnesota trip is now complete. The amount noted as pending in the report has subsequently been received, giving us a net profit of \$579 for that trip in addition to the \$2,000 already counted in trip donations.

Numbers for other trips are not yet final.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

Tom attended the Audubon NY-CT chapter meeting held in Glens Falls. There was a presentation about the Motus wildlife tracking system, a network of automated radio telemetry towers used to track tagged birds and other wildlife. Anne noted that costs for these towers have come down and SMRA might consider applying for a grant to purchase and install a Motus tower in one of the SMRA sanctuaries.

Erin McGrath led a discussion at the NY-CT chapter meeting about legislative priorities in New York State for NAS and Audubon NY-CT. Pending bills include the Bird-Safe Building (Flaco) Act, a bill to extend preferential tax treatment for the installation of green roofing and a bill to fund building wildlife overpasses over major highways to reduce wildlife mortality.

Anne discussed the proposed Snowden Woods development in the Village of Ossining. This project would build several apartment buildings on a seven-acre wooded tract that is part of a 50-acre, intact wooded parcel adjacent to the Hudson River south of the Avalon apartment complex on Route 9. SMRA is drafting a letter to oppose this development, noting the critical need for maintaining large, unfragmented wooded habitats in this important migratory corridor for birds. Bill raised the issue of whether SMRA’s opposition could end up being counterproductive, in that if the Village failed to approve the rezoning that would allow clustering of the new buildings, the developer could use his as-of-right ability to develop the property resulting in more woodland clearing. Erik tasked the Advocacy Committee to evaluate this issue at its upcoming meeting.

Tom updated the board on state legislation to reduce or eliminate the harvesting of horseshoe crabs. A bill sponsored by Senator Hoylman that has been stuck in committee in the state senate for several years has finally made it out of committee. This bill would restrict the non-medical harvesting of horseshoe crabs. Ken contacted Assembly member Chris Burdick who agree to cosponsor this bill. However, we have since learned from the below Zoom meeting that the DEC opposes the Hoylman bill, saying it lacks the resources to enforce the proposed restrictions.

Anne and Tom R participated in a Zoom meeting led by Citizens Campaign for the Environment bringing together many organizations on the topic of New York regulation of horseshoe crab harvesting. The Citizens Campaign does not support the Hoylman bill but rather is advocating for a complete ban on horseshoe crab taking, including bleeding for pharmaceutical use. Ken noted that the Advocacy Committee is discussing whether to recommend that SMRA support the Hoylman bill or advocate for a total ban. Committee member Patricia Watson is drafting a letter to the FDA to support efforts to expedite the approval of synthetic substitutes for horseshoe crab blood.

SMRA board members have been invited to attend a special nighttime field trip to be held on June 21 at the Jamaica Bay NWR and led by Jamaica Bay guardian Don Riepe to observe horseshoe crabs laying eggs in the full moon. We are hoping to hiring a bus to take our group from Pruyn Sanctuary to the Jamaica Bay NWR Visitor Center. It will be a short walk to the censusing sites. Please let Anne know if you (and one guest) would like to attend.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Anne called attention to the updated board/staff roster pages in tonight's meeting packet that are for board member handbooks.

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 complaint against the neighbor for damage to SMRA's property. As noted in the Treasurer's Report, above, we have made a second retainer payment of \$5,000 to Mr. Freedman. The board authorized this expenditure at its March meeting. A ruling on the defendant's motion to dismiss SMRA's civil complaint is still pending. The criminal trial in Town Court of this defendant for various violations of the Town of New Castle's environmental statutes is now scheduled to take place on May 16 and 17 but is likely to be postponed again until later.

At its March meeting, the board of directors approved a Larry Light Scholarship for \$1,800 for Arabella Pajoochi to attend the Science + Nature Camp at the Penikese Island School pending her acceptance. Arabella has now been accepted to what should be a great program for 7th and 8th grade girls who will work with women scientists including some from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Taylor Huse, our other Larry Light Scholarship recipient, will be attending the 2024 Washington Youth Summit on the Environment to be held this summer at George Mason University.

This spring, SMRA is hoping to lead field trips for schools from Yonkers, New York City (Harlem), New Rochelle and Chappaqua. Of these, only Chappaqua is confirmed. It has gotten more difficult to finalize agreements with school districts, but we remain hopeful. Some school programs may be deferred until fall. Busing costs to bring students to Rockefeller State Park Preserve for these programs are covered by New York State's Connect Kids to Parks program.

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

See tonight's meeting agenda for upcoming public programs and regional field trips. Further details are available on SMRA's website—see the online calendar. Upcoming trips to Yellowstone (May 15–21) and Panama (Nov. 15–23) are fully subscribed.

Our recent trip to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas provided great birding. We were happy with our guide although a medical issue with the guide required some alterations to our itinerary. Additionally, a weather delay prevented our scheduled departure; we ended up staying an extra night. These hiccups required some extra expenses. The ten percent extra expense contingency we budgeted was used up. Total trip costs are expected to exceed revenues but excluding donations of \$200/person made by trip participants.

SMRA's annual birding tea will be hosted again by board member Cary Andrews. This is always a fun event; board members who have not attended in the past should consider going this year. The birding tea also raises funds for Saw Mill River Audubon.

Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney

There will not be a seed sale on the 3rd Saturday in April. We are pleased with our inventory management as this seed sale season draws to a close because there is very little seed left in the shed.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

In late March a large tulip tree that was damaged and presented a hazard to the boardwalk trail at Pinecliff Sanctuary was taken down by Westchester Tree Life. See the SMRA Facebook page for videos of this work.

Heavy precipitation from fall through winter and now spring has resulted in very muddy trails in our sanctuaries, especially Brinton Brook. We're planning to place more wood chips in the area of the Brinton parking lot trailhead to try to dry things out. Danny is scheduled to mow the Pruyn meadow later this month, provided we can get the mower in place with the very wet conditions. Otherwise we will ask him to do brush cutting.

We will receive our order of seedlings purchased from the NYS DEC Tree Nursery on April 26 or 27. There may be some leftover trees after we do our sanctuary plantings; these will be made available to board members.

Michael called on Phil who described work planned in our Pruyn Sanctuary by volunteers from the Westchester Trail Tramps of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. This will involve a reroute of a wet and muddy trail.

Pruyn Garden Update—Mark Magel

Mark described the talk he gave at the Jay Heritage Center. This well-attended and well-received talk covered the benefits of using native plants, along with some beneficial non-natives, in our gardens. Mark spoke following a presentation by author Doug Tallamy. Dr. Tallamy pointed out that oaks are the most beneficial of native trees, hosting a diverse population of insects critical to birds. We will be planting two white oaks this spring in the Pruyn Sanctuary.

On April 17 Mark will do initial cleanup work in the Pruyn gardens. Mark referenced the article he wrote for the spring issue of the SMRA newsletter on the importance of deferring garden cleanups until warmer weather to prevent destroying overwintering insects. On April 24 garden volunteers will meet at Pruyn. This will be the first of scheduled weekly volunteer workdays in Pruyn.

Pruyn House Update—Ginger Bernardin

Ginger, assisted by Erik, will install new flooring in the Pruyn House kitchen later this week.

We plan to renegotiate our fuel oil delivery contract as the current contract will expire soon.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim for Jenni Stern

The deadline for the summer issue is May 1. We welcome submissions and article ideas.

New Business—Erik Andersen

Erik said that SMRA has been in discussions with an Audubon chapter in our region that is looking to terminate; SMRA has been approached about absorbing the chapter's membership. Legal counsel provided by the Pro Bono Legal Partnership has been representing SMRA in these discussions. The board will be kept updated as talks continue. Erik noted that SMRA's membership in the Pro Bono Legal Partnership had expired (see minutes of the February board meeting) but has now been reinstated.

Adjournment—Erik Andersen

Motion to adjourn the meeting by Ginger Bernardin. Seconded by: Steve Rappaport. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:46 PM.