

Saw Mill River Audubon
May 6, 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 Heidelberg, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, William Kellner**, Rik Kaufman, Valerie Lyle, Tom McEnerney, **Michael Madias, Jr.**, 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: Valerie, Tom McE., Mark, Kara, Ken, Rik, Steve, Richard, Jean, Larry

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 April 15, 2024 and as circulated.
Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the dates for future meetings of the board of directors listed at the bottom of tonight's meeting agenda. Our June meeting (Mon., June 3) will be held in conjunction with the SMRA annual picnic dinner at Senasqua Park, Croton. After that, the next two meetings, scheduled for September 9 and October 7, will be held here at the Croton Free Library. The last board meeting of the calendar year will be a Zoom gathering on Dec. 9.

Our auditor search is continuing. A national shortage of CPAs is making the process more difficult and will probably lead to an increase in costs for audit services. The board should consider the possibility of having our auditors do an audit review as opposed to a traditional audit. In an audit review, which would meet New York's audit requirements, SMRA would vouch for the accuracy of data submitted to the auditors. Costs should be lower than for a traditional audit. Tom McE. is finalizing an RFP for audit services. The RFP will ask for pricing for both a traditional audit and an audit review. The RFP will seek a three-year engagement with the selected audit firm.

Fundraising and Development Committee Report—Suzanne Kavic

[Reference Membership Report as of May 3, 2024.]

With the current 617 SMRA chapter member households and 429 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,046. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2024 stands at \$2,788.

Suzanne reminded board members that we will meet on May 13 at the Croton Point Park Nature Center for our PSing party for board members to personalize the letters to be mailed for our annual fund drive. Pizza will be served. Packets for board members who will not attend the May 13 gathering have been brought to this meeting; remember to pick yours up tonight if you're not going on May 13 and to mail your letters as soon as you can.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

For our official quarterly report, as of April 1, 2024, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,440,568, a 6.1% (\$82,514) increase above the January 1, 2024 balance of \$1,358,054. As of April 1, the one-year, three-year, five-year and ten-year investment rates of return were 15.7%, 4.7%, 8.1% and 6.9% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 12.2%, 3.5%, 6.1% and 5.0% for the same periods. More recently, the balance as of May 1, 2024 was \$1,391,801 which is a 3.4% (\$48,767) decrease for the month of April but a 2.5% (\$33,747) increase year-to-date. So far during 2024 there have been \$8,000 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio. As of May 1, 2024, we are 29.5% (\$48,964) 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 1/1/2024–5/2/2024]

Last year we mailed our Annual Fund letters over a month earlier than our traditional May mailings in order to focus on opening registration for the NY Birders Conference. Thus, in 2023 we had received over \$25,000 in annual fund donations by this time compared to the \$8,000 we have so far this year. Note that in 2022, when we did our usual May fund drive, we had just over \$9,000 at this point in time.

We are handling Membership revenues slightly differently this year, putting the first \$35 of donations into Membership for any member who didn't send us a separate membership renewal.

Other revenues are where we would expect things for this time of year.

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

As was mentioned at last month's board meeting, Pruyn House property taxes (\$3,762) for the year were paid on March 31. We've paid \$4,200 for heating oil so far this year, compared to \$1,311 at this point last year. Going forward, we expect costs to lower as we've negotiated a lower per gallon rate with Burke Heat (see Pruyn House Report, below).

The Rio Grande trip is now complete and we ended up with a net of \$297 in addition to the \$2,400 already counted in trip donations. The May 2024 Yellowstone and November 2024 Panama trip budgets are still in progress.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

Two legislative initiatives in New York State to protect horseshoe crab populations have been merged into one proposed bill. State Senator Hoylman's bill for a partial harvest ban encountered opposition from the DEC. The new initiative that is moving forward calls for a complete ban on harvesting that would last three years (the Hoylman bill had a five-year ban). The bill, which is now before the full Senate, is still in committee in the Assembly. The Advocacy Committee will work for passage of the ban as the legislative process continues. Phil asked whether the proposed ban would cover medical uses of horseshoe crab blood. Tom said, yes, all harvesting of the crabs would be prohibited, noting a full ban is easier to enforce than a partial one.

At its recent meeting, the Advocacy Committee discussed the proposed Snowden Woods development proposal 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 has drafted a letter to oppose this development, noting the critical need for maintaining large, unfragmented wooded habitat in this important migratory corridor for birds. The Executive Committee has approved the letter.

SMRA has signed on to a letter supporting the New York Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act that is before the New York State legislature. The law aims to reduce single use plastics and other packaging materials. Its stated goal is to reduce packaging waste in New York by 50% over a 12-year period. The plastics industry is actively opposing the measure.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

SMRA has been in discussions with an Audubon chapter in our region that is looking to close; SMRA was approached by this chapter about absorbing the chapter's membership. Legal counsel provided by the Pro Bono Legal Partnership has been representing SMRA in these discussions. The Pro Bono Legal Partnership is also representing the chapter that is looking to terminate with a different group of attorneys. At this time, that chapter's pro bono lawyers are awaiting financial data from the treasurer of the other chapter. SMRA's goal is to develop a written agreement with the chapter looking to close, spelling out details of how SMRA would absorb the chapter's membership and take over functions in its territory. With this written agreement in place, the closing chapter would approach the National Audubon Society with the goal of NAS agreeing to subsequent absorption by SMRA of its members and function.

Anne updated the board on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor 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. A ruling on the defendant's motion to dismiss SMRA's civil complaint is still pending; the date for oral arguments on this motion has been delayed. 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 may be delayed to June or later.

We have only one school scheduled, an elementary school in Harlem, for this spring under the NYS Connect Kids to Parks program. We hoped to run Connect Kids to Parks field trips for schools in Yonkers, New Rochelle and the Bronx, but unfortunately the teachers in question, with the exception of the Harlem school, have missed the NYS application deadline for this spring. We hope that these schools will participate with us in the fall.

Anne will conduct training sessions this spring and summer with SMRA educators Cathy Hildenbrand and Pete Salmonsohn using curriculum materials developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The June meeting of the SMRA board of directors will be held at our annual picnic, June 3 at 5:30 PM at Senasqua Park, Croton-on-Hudson. Board members are asked to let Anne know if there are any SMRA members that they would like to see invited.

Pruyn Garden Update—Anne Swaim for Mark Magel

Garden volunteers met with Mark on April 23. They discussed setting up a biweekly schedule for workdays in the garden. We have at least six new volunteers looking to help with garden maintenance. The new white oaks will be planted in mid-June. We're also looking to do a variety of plantings around Pruyn House at the same time.

Program's and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

SMRA board members have been invited to participate in the nighttime horseshoe crab census to be held on June 21 at the Jamaica Bay NWR. We are 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. Seats are still available on the bus. Those driving themselves will meet up with the rest of the group in the parking lot of the visitor center.

Anne hosted a Zoom meeting last night for those signed up for our upcoming (May 15–21) trip to Yellowstone National Park. This trip is fully subscribed.

Anne called on Cary who urged board members to attend the annual Birding Tea to be held at her home in Croton-on-Hudson on June 15. In addition to being an important fundraiser for SMRA, the tea is always a fun event for the birding community. Delicious treats will be served. Let Cary know by email if you're planning to come.

Cary also asked for volunteers to go to Croton Landing in the early mornings (6:00 AM) to play recordings of the Purple Martin's song at the Purple Martin house that the Village of Croton-on-Hudson has installed. The hope is that this will lure passing martins to establish nests in the martin house. Call or email Cary if you can help out.

Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim for Tom McEnerney

Remaining seed is being offered for sale at a 30% discount.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

We did a planting at Brinton Brook Sanctuary with 50 plants on April 27. Michael has picked up the trees ordered from the NYS DEC Saratoga Nursery. Three species we had ordered were missing but we're hoping the missing plants will still arrive. Sanctuary plantings with these new trees will be scheduled for later this spring.

Board members are urged to visit Brinton Brook and Pruyn Sanctuaries to see the abundant wildflowers that have bloomed this rainy spring. Anne said that the wet weather has impacted our sanctuary trails, noting that the puncheon walkway installed at Brinton Brook under Phil's leadership has demonstrated its value, performing well in a winter and spring with excessive precipitation.

Pruyn House Update—Ginger Bernardin

Ginger and Erik installed new flooring in the Pruyn House kitchen. The old kitchen tiles were replaced with interlocking vinyl tiles. Because the new floor is slightly higher, the kitchen doors had to be removed and planed down and then rehung.

Erik discussed his negotiations with Burke Heat that resulted in SMRA's contracted price for fuel oil being reduced to \$3.53 per gallon, down from \$5.18. We anticipate annual savings of around \$1,600 based on current usage. We will continue with our service contract with Burke; annual cost is \$289.

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

Production of the summer issue is in process. Please make sure Jenni gets any submissions for the issue no later than May 15. This will be the second issue of the newsletter to be distributed digitally, resulting in significant cost savings over printing and mailing to our full list. The spring issue was our first issue to be distributed digitally. We mailed 270 printed copies to members for whom we did not have an email address. These members were informed that the spring issue would be the last printed issue to be mailed to them unless they formally request to continue getting a printed copy.

New Business—Erik Andersen

Anne informed the board that a Red-tailed Hawk was found dead recently in the ball field parking lot at Croton Point Park by Charlie Roberto. This bird, affectionately known as Larry, was the male of a mated pair who have been multi-year repeat nesters in the park. After being notified by Charlie, Anne picked up the dead bird and took it to the NYS DEC lab in New Paltz for necropsy. An update will be provided when results of the post mortem exam are received. Anne noted that Larry had previously been treated for ingesting rat poison, pointing out that there are alternative rodenticides that are less likely to harm birds that eat rodents who have consumed these poisons.

Adjournment—Erik Andersen

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:16 PM.