

**Saw Mill River Audubon
January 6, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting held via 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: Tom McE., Mark, Kara, Steve, Richard, Jean

Meeting started at 7:01 PM.

President's Report—Erik Andersen

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting and called for a motion to approve the minutes of the October board meeting as circulated.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on December 9, 2024 and as circulated. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Philip Heidelberger. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the Conflict of Interest form that was attached to the email sent to board members with details of tonight's meeting. Board members need to fill out and sign the form and return it to the SMRA office.

Erik reported on the in-process dissolution of Central Westchester Audubon Society (CWAS) and potential re-assignment of CWAS zip codes to SMRA. A non-binding memorandum of understanding has been vetted by attorneys for SMRA and CWAS and signed by both parties. The next step will be a meeting of the CWAS membership with the goal of getting membership approval of the chapter's dissolution. Once that occurs, SMRA will be able to contact CWAS members directly.

Erik noted that New York State has increased the requirements for 501(c)3 non-profits to dissolve. The NYS Department of State and the Attorney General's office must grant approval. The AG's office will approve the transfer of assets from a dissolving 501(c)-3 to a charity pursuing the same mission. This should be straightforward as the missions of CWAS and SMRA overlap.

Phil asked Erik if the National Audubon Society needs to approve the merger of the two chapters. Erik noted that, in a joint letter to CWAS and SMRA, NAS expressed support for the transfer of CWAS zip codes to SMRA.

The SMRA Annual Dinner is scheduled for April 6. We've selected a great venue, the redesigned Travelers Rest, and we're putting together a compelling program. The ticket price for the event is \$150, as approved at the October board meeting. Erik noted that a digital file of blank tickets for the 2025 quilt raffle is attached to the email that was sent to board members prior to tonight's meeting. Board members are encouraged to sell as many tickets as they can and also to purchase tickets for themselves.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of January 1, 2025, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,460,319, a 3.0% (\$44,792) decrease for the month of December and a 7.5% (\$102,265) increase above the January 1, 2024 balance of \$1,358,054. There were no additions to and \$84,877 of withdrawals from the endowment during 2024. As of January 1, 2025, we are 36.0% (\$59,786) 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 Revenue and Expenses]

The report shows the end of year summary for 2024. Included is a 2023 summary for comparison, and also our 2025 Budget for reference.

At first glance it may appear that our Annual Fund (AF) revenue was approximately \$3,000 less in 2024 than in 2023. You will note that Membership revenue is up by approximately \$3,400, reflecting our shift in the accounting practice of categorizing the first \$35 of any donation as part of the membership category. This means our AF and membership revenue for 2024 is almost exactly the same as 2023. We had more trips in 2024, resulting in higher trip donation amounts, and in 2025 we will be raising the SMRA trip donation per person to \$250 from \$200. We also received matching grants from the same person twice in 2024, once for his 2023 donation of \$3,000 and again near the end of 2024 for his 2024 \$3,000 donation, so expect matching grant numbers to decrease in 2025.

We discussed seed sale and school program revenues at the December board meeting.

Expenses are summarized on Page 2. Everything looks in line with what we expected for the year. A couple of notes: The Pruyn Boundary litigation costs are shown in brackets to indicate they are "off budget" items. Also note the expenses shown for the Garden Endowment in brackets come out of the restricted category formerly called Butterfly Garden Endowment and are in addition to Arboretum and Garden expenses taken from the larger Unrestricted Endowment. And the Larry Light Scholarship expenses are taken from the separate Larry Light endowment. Any gifts toward the Larry Light fund noted on page 1 are put into this endowment.

Bottom line: Total expenses for the year 2024 exceeded revenue by \$73,354, which was slightly less than budgeted expectations and covered by endowment transfers of 6% from the unrestricted SMRA endowment.

Erik asked Lynn where things stand with the upcoming audit of 2024 finances. Lynn said that all materials needed by the auditors should be ready by April and that the auditors have approved this schedule.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Anne called on Larry to update the board on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor who was prosecuted by the Town of New Castle for various environmental law violations and the related civil action filed by SMRA to recover damages to SMRA property. Larry said that, in the civil action, SMRA had requested that the court find the defendants to be in default. The court has now ruled in SMRA's favor. The next step is consideration of damages to be awarded to SMRA. A separate hearing will be scheduled in which SMRA will detail monetary damages to our property. Damage to SMRA property includes trees destroyed, trees damaged and dumping of debris onto SMRA property that was originally on the property of the defendants. We previously hired a consulting arborist to help quantify the damages. Anne noted that our consultant would be available to testify at the hearing if needed.

Anne continued, reporting on the current epidemic of avian influenza. Snow Geese in Maryland and Pennsylvania have suffered significant mortality as a result of this virus. The upcoming New York State Waterfowl

Count, under the auspices of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA), will help determine impacts in our state and region. While avian flu seems not to have affected song birds, caution is urged when handling bird feeders; hand washing immediately afterwards is recommended.

EagleFest will be held on February 1. Note the roster of volunteer assignments attached to the email sent to board members with details of tonight's meeting. Check your scheduled time and let Anne know if any changes are required.

The always popular SMRA Soup Social will be held at the Nature Center in Croton Point Park on January 11. Volunteer help is requested. Also taking place next weekend (on January 12) is the annual kickoff conference of the New York State Young Birders Club. SMRA is pleased to be, once again, hosting the meeting, which will be at Teatown this year.

Pruyn House Committee—Ginger Bernardin

The carpet in the office is very old and worn; replacement has been scheduled. Painting the office in conjunction with installing new carpet makes sense, so this will also be part of the project. An anonymous donor has generously offered to contribute \$2,000 for this work in the SMRA office. A future project will be repairing the Pruy House driveway, especially the portion nearest to Millwood Road. We will be getting quotes for the driveway later this spring.

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

Kathleen reported that the SMRA Nature Book Club will meet on Zoom on January 7 at 7:00 PM. We'll discuss *The Darkness Manifesto* by Johan Eklöf. Joining the meeting will be Dr. Sheila Kannappan, Professor of Astronomy at the University of North Carolina. Dr. Kannappan will update us on the need for dark skies and the best ways to view the aurora borealis.

Valerie discussed the reintroduction of Project FeederWatch at the Croton Point Park Nature Center on Sunday mornings through April 25. This is a good place for outreach to a new audience and we've been pleased to see new participants in attendance. Literature about SMRA is available.

Anne called attention to the list of upcoming programs and field trips in the agenda for tonight's meeting. The New York State Waterfowl Count (see Executive Director's report, above) takes place January 17–19. Anne will be censusing waterfowl on the Hudson River in the northern half of Westchester County on Jan. 17. Let her know if you'd like to participate. Board members should also consider attending the Zoom program Anne will lead for various libraries on February 7. The topic is Owls of Westchester. Finally, the late afternoon program at the Shawangunk Grassland National Wildlife Refuge on February 10 is highly recommended as we'll be treated to the thrilling sight of Short-eared Owls taking flight as darkness falls.

Advocacy Committee—Tom Ruth

The Advocacy Committee will meet on January 8. We'll discuss our response to Governor Hochul's veto of the Horseshoe Crab Protection act and whether there is any chance of reviving the bill in the legislature. We also plan to discuss other legislative efforts, including the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act, which has yet to pass in the state legislature. Ken noted that another veto by the Governor was on legislation that would have provided state funding for studying wildlife overpasses on roadways.

Other discussion topics include a possible webinar tentatively scheduled for March 27 to promote environmentally friendly garden practices, especially ways to eliminate use of harmful neonicotinoid pesticides. We'll also take a look at the status of efforts to improve habitat for grassland birds and insect pollinators by removing invasive plants at the Croton Point Park landfill.

Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim for Tom McEnerney

One more volunteer is needed for the January sale day (Jan. 19, 11:00 AM–1:00 PM). Bill said he would accompany Michael who had already signed up.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

The 2024 SMRA deer management program has concluded with a total harvest of five deer. Four were taken at the Brinton Brook Sanctuary and one at Pruyn Sanctuary. None were taken at Choate Sanctuary. Anne noted that Choate has seen increased visitation and, because of this, continuation of Choate in the deer management program may be problematic. Erik expressed his appreciation to the vetted hunters who participated in the program, noting that they have all been very careful and respectful of sanctuary visitors.

Michael called attention to the schedule of upcoming sanctuary boundary walks listed on tonight's meeting agenda. Walks take place at 9:00 AM on Fridays. Board members are encouraged to attend one or more of these walks where we'll assess the status of our sanctuary borders and determine whether new signs or other improvements are needed.

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

Spring issue deadline is February 1.

New Business—Erik Andersen

Larry called attention to the obituary, appearing in the *New York Times*, of Marie Winn, who chronicled the story of Pale Male, Central Park's iconic Red-tailed Hawk.

Erik noted that upcoming dates for meetings of the board of directors are listed on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

Adjournment—Erik Andersen

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:09 PM.