

**Saw Mill River Audubon**

**March 3, 2025 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 Novenster**n, Steve Rappaport, **Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon**, Richard Saravay, **Jean Sparacin**, Jennifer Stern, **Larry Trachtenberg**, Kathleen Williamson. Executive Director **Anne Swaim** was also present.

Absent: Mitch, Suzanne, Steve, Richard, Jenni, Kathleen

Meeting started at 7:01 PM.

**President's Report—Erik Andersen**

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting. There was a brief discussion of the Zoom AI feature. Larry expressed concerns about privacy aspects of turning this feature on for the Zoom board meeting and stated his preference for in-person meetings. Erik noted that the next two board meetings scheduled for this spring would be in-person and that he would support making the March meeting in-person.

Erik, after asking if there were any changes to be made to the minutes of the February 3 board meeting, called for a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting as circulated.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on February 3, 2025 and as circulated.  
Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Tom Ruth. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called on Tom McE. for an update of the status of the potential absorption by SMRA of the territory of Central Westchester Audubon Society (CWAS). Tom said that not much movement had occurred since the previous board meeting and that lawyers for CWAS had yet to present a dissolution plan to the CWAS board of directors.

Erik reminded board members to continue selling tickets for the fundraising quilt raffle with the drawing to take place at the upcoming Annual Dinner. Tickets sold and proceeds should be submitted to the SMRA office.

Erik asked Anne the status of the chapter Annual Report to be submitted to the National Audubon Society (NAS). Anne replied that the report was submitted well in advance of the deadline and that we have already received our baseline funding payment from NAS in response.

Erik noted that next on the agenda is the election for board of directors, officers and various committees. He informed the board that Rik has decided not to run for a new term on the board, thanking Rik for his 18 years of dedicated service on the board. Erik said he appreciated Rik's important role as a member of the Finance Committee and that SMRA is fortunate that Rik will be running for a new term on the committee.

Rik said that, although he would be leaving the board, he intends to remain an active SMRA member and would help wherever he can. He said he treasured his time on the board of an organization that is so effective and does such important work.

Erik then called on Bill as chair of the Nominating Committee to read the slates of candidates for director, officers and various committees.

### **Nominating Committee—William Kellner**

William Kellner, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the board of directors with a three-year term to begin immediately and end when their successors are elected and qualified: Mitchell Goldfarb, Valerie Lyle, Thomas McEnerney, Lynn Salmon, Jean Sparacin, Jennifer Stern. Erik Andersen asked for a motion that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the board of directors. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

William Kellner, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following candidates for officers of the board of directors with a one-year term to begin immediately and end when their successors are elected and qualified: President—Erik Andersen; Vice President—Suzanne Kavic; Treasurer—Lynn Salmon; Secretary—William Kellner; Board Chair—Valerie Lyle. Erik Andersen asked for a motion that the board of directors' vote to approve these candidates for officers of the board of directors. Motion by: Phil Heidelberger. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

William Kellner, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Executive Committee with a one-year term to begin immediately and end when their successors are elected and qualified: Erik Andersen (Chair), Suzanne Kavic, Valerie Lyle, Lynn Salmon, Philip Heidelberger, William Kellner. Erik Andersen asked for a motion that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Executive Committee. Motion by: Mark Magel. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

William Kellner, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Audit Committee with a one-year term to begin immediately and end when their successors are elected and qualified: Mitchell Goldfarb (Chair), Judith Lavenberg, Henry Seduski. Erik Andersen asked for a motion that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Audit Committee. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

William Kellner, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, submitted the following slate of candidates for the Finance Committee with a one-year term to begin immediately and end when their successors are elected and qualified: Philip Heidelberger (Chair), Erik Andersen, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, Valerie Lyle, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Patricia Watson. Erik Andersen asked for a motion that the board of directors vote to approve this slate of candidates for the Finance Committee. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Bill expressed his thanks to Steve Rappaport and John Cavallero for serving again this year on the Nominating Committee.

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

As of March 1, 2025, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,469,919, which is an increase of 0.7% (\$9,600) above the January 1, 2025 balance of \$1,460,319 but a 1.6% (\$24,415) decrease for the month of February. There have been no additions to, and \$15,000 of withdrawals from, the endowment during 2025. As of March 1, 2025 we are 33.9% (\$53,120) 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 YTD 03/2/25]

As expected, January and February are typically low months for donations, and that the revenue stream should pick up once we get to our annual fund drive.

Seed sales are up, probably due to the cold weather we've had this winter.

Expenses all look to be as expected based on the budget, and/or last year's numbers.

The annual dinner is still a month away, but we've had 27 people pay for their annual dinner spots thus far so we expect that the attendance will be good.

After cancelling the proposed June Alaska trip due to an insufficient number of registrations, Anne made quick work of getting two other trip offerings in the works. Fourteen people have put down deposits for the coastal DE/NJ trip, and we've received ten deposits for the May Yellowstone trip.

We made another payment to the lawyer representing us in the civil law suit we've filed over the Pruyn Boundary issue. Note that the 2025 payments include the balance owed for work completed through February 4, 2025, plus an additional \$5,000 retainer. Erik queried whether the total paid for legal services to date is \$22,000. Lynn confirmed that \$22,574 has been paid to date for legal services, soil testing, and arborist work. The additional \$5,000 retainer brings the total to \$27,574.

### **Membership Report—Anne Swaim for Suzanne Kavic**

[Reference Membership Report as of February 25, 2025.]

Anne noted we've seen a healthy increase in membership so far this year, with signups at EagleFest and other programs helping to boost numbers.

With the current 774 SMRA chapter member households and 480 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,254. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2025 stands at \$891 (2025 budgeted goal is \$13,055).

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

Anne noted that we are one month away from the Annual Dinner. To date we have 34 signups; we should have no problem exceeding the breakeven attendance level. Using the Zoom share screen function, Anne displayed the Annual Dinner program and volunteer signup sheet. Board members filled slots in the signup sheet for help with greeting attendees, setting up the table floral arrangements and photo exhibit, and packing up SMRA materials at the end of the dinner. The filled-in signup sheet will be distributed to the board by email, along with the dinner's program. Volunteers should arrive at Travelers Rest no later than 4:30 PM on April 6.

At the Annual Dinner, SMRA will recognize Pete Harckham for his work on environmental protection in the NYS Senate. Anne thanked Ken for arranging Senator Harckham's participation in the program.

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 SMRA has expressed its willingness to engage in mediation to see if a settlement can be reached and that our attorney has met with the offenders' attorney to inform him that we would like to use the court-appointed mediator. We are awaiting a response from the defense. Ken pointed out that a delay in initiating mediation might be helpful because we may get a chance to see which trees in the damaged area leaf out, allowing us to make a better assessment of monetary damages.

Anne noted that the court-imposed remedies in the criminal trial held last summer, including developing and implementing a replanting schedule and soil testing on dumped fill, have not yet taken place. The Town prosecutor has indicated that the Town intends to follow up to ensure compliance with the court orders.

Updating the board on an upcoming trip, Anne said the trip to south Jersey and Delmarva scheduled for five nights beginning June 3 has 14 signups, each of whom will donate \$300 to SMRA as part of their trip fees.

There is good news and bad news to report concerning the NYS Connect Kids to Parks program. The program has been reauthorized; Ossining schools have indicated they would like to participate again this year with us at Rockefeller State Park Preserve (RSPP). Unfortunately, in the list of eligible parks listed by NYS, interpretive fees are not covered at RSPP, meaning SMRA's fees would not be reimbursable to the school district. As interpretive fees are reimbursable for most of the parks listed, leaving RSPP off the list may have been an oversight by NYS. We are trying to get this rectified. Busing fees would be covered.

Efforts to reestablish SMRA education programs at the preschool level are bearing fruit. As reported in the minutes of the February board meeting, we had a very successful session at the Holy Name of Mary Montessori School in Croton where Anne and Cathy Hildenbrand shared the teaching duties to positive reviews. The school has now scheduled a follow-up program with us in April.

Continuing with SMRA education programs, Anne informed the board that we've scheduled fifth grade field trips from the Greenburgh-Graham UFSD at RSPP. Another RSPP program has been scheduled with second graders from the Seely Place School in the Edgemont district. We also have two dates scheduled with Scarsdale schools for RSPP. These programs will be paid by the school districts.

The successful Lunetta Explorer Bags program is expanding with the New Rochelle Library being added to the program. The Lunetta Explorer Bags may be borrowed from twelve local public libraries. They contain a set of items, including binoculars, bird ID cards and activity idea cards, to encourage young people to explore the natural world. Erik asked if we have usage data to help us evaluate how the program is working. Anne replied that, depending on the library, the bags are borrowed as frequently as once a month on average with some libraries averaging once every two or three months.

The family of the late Patricia Quinn Moss, a frequent walker in our Brinton Brook Sanctuary, has made a generous donation for a bench to be installed in the sanctuary with a plaque to honor Patricia. The bench will be placed near the existing bench on the shore of the Brinton pond.

### **Advocacy Committee—Tom Ruth**

The Advocacy Committee welcomed two new members recently—Dr. Laura Lenihan and Stephanie Atkinson. Laura is working on getting the Town of New Castle to install solar panels above the parking lot at the Chappaqua railroad station. She is also working on getting the Town to stop placing rodenticides outside public buildings as this can lead to poisoning of raptors who eat contaminated rodents. Stephanie, with her extensive experience as a legislative aide and political consultant, will assist with outreach to our representatives at various levels of government.

We're continuing our focus on the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act, which was vetoed by Governor Hochul. We're working with our state legislators to try to get the bill reintroduced in the upcoming legislative session. And while opposition from the DEC may have been partly behind the Governor's veto, we've been informed that the department will undertake increased monitoring of horseshoe crab populations.

The Governor also vetoed the Wildlife Crossing Act. We've been informed that the bill will probably not be reintroduced, in part because of opposition from the Department of Transportation.

While the state legislature failed to pass the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act, the bill will be reintroduced this session; we're hopeful that it will pass both houses and get signed by Governor Hochul. Senator Pete Harckham is a sponsor of the bill.

Tom reported on his participation in a Zoom meeting with Audubon NY Policy Manager Erin McGrath.

Reestablishing the Connect Kids to Parks program was discussed (see also, Executive Director's Report, above).

Tom continued, informing the board about the Zoom program scheduled for May 8 to promote environmentally friendly garden practices, especially ways to eliminate use of harmful neonicotinoid pesticides. The Zoom program will be followed by a guided walk on May 10 at Croton Point Park in which the importance of native plants to maintain and improve habitat for birds will be stressed. Kara, along with non-board Advocacy Committee member Patricia Watson, are planning these events.

Ken reported that he, along with Advocacy Committee chair Tom R. and Anne, spoke by phone to Ben Goldfarb, author of *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*. David Brant, Executive Director of the Aspetuck Land Trust, was also a part of the conversation. The Advocacy Committee is planning a June 12 webinar, which will feature Ben discussing his book. We are working with Kathleen to coordinate with the SMRA Nature Book Club.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney**

A fairly cold winter with snow has helped seed sales. We've had to place a second order to do some restocking. Sales are continuing at a good pace; we expect most of inventory to be sold. Our March seed sale Saturday is scheduled for March 16. Michael and Tom McE. have volunteered to staff the sale.

### **Sanctuaries—Michael Madias**

Boundary walks in the SMRA sanctuaries are ongoing. We walked the Graff Sanctuary boundary on February 7. We walked part of the Pruyn Sanctuary boundary on the morning of February 21 and we plan to finish the Pruyn boundary walk on March 7. Additional walk dates are listed in the agenda for this meeting. Board members are welcome to attend; no RSVP is needed. Michael will return to the sanctuaries to paint the boundary stakes as needed.

The driveway providing access to the Brinton Brook Sanctuary needs additional gravel. Danny Ferguson will assess what's needed and estimate costs.

Val noted that a large group held an unauthorized visit to Brinton Brook. The number of vehicles exceeded the sanctuary's available parking. Anne said she would remind the group that we require advance notice to schedule group visits to our sanctuaries, as stated on all the sanctuary pages on our website and on our maps.

Erik asked whether we are ordering more trees this year from the DEC nursery. Michael replied that we will skip ordering this year as there are some leftovers from last year's order but that we plan an order for 2026.

### **Pruyn Gardens—Mark Magel**

We plan to assess the status of the Pruyn gardens in about one month, but our expectation is that the cold winter with some snow has been a positive for our plantings. Initial spring work in the gardens will take place in the first week of April. The first meeting of garden volunteers is scheduled for April 30.

Mark elaborated on the plan to install informational signs in the gardens that was discussed at the February board meeting. We're looking at creating five signs on separate topics. The Bird and Butterfly Garden will get a sign explaining the importance of pollinators; a sign in the Meadow Garden will cover the importance of proper watering and root depth; the unmown meadow will get a sign about wildlife habitat issues; we'll install a sign at the Pruyn House plantings discussing fruits and berries; and, finally, a sign near the newly planted oaks will cover the many benefits of planting native oaks. Mark is doing an initial writeup of the signs and will send the text around for comment.

### **Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim**

Anne called attention to the list of upcoming programs and field trips in the agenda for tonight's meeting and in the online calendar on SMRA website. Board members are urged to attend the March 27 program at the Chappaqua Library that will feature photos and stories from SMRA's recent trip to Panama. On April 17 Anne will present a multimedia Zoom workshop on spring bird sounds cosponsored by a consortium of Westchester public libraries.

Anne has been in contact with the environmental club at Westchester Community College. This could be a fruitful partnership for SMRA. In April, Anne will lead a bird walk with the group on the WCC campus.

The next meeting of the Nature Book Club will be via Zoom on April 1. Kathleen will lead a discussion of Dan Eagan's *The Devil's Element*.

Val reported on Project FeederWatch, which has seen good attendance at the Croton Point Park Nature Center. A benefit for SMRA is that we're reaching a new audience; we've already gotten a couple of new members.

### **Newsletter—Anne Swaim for Jenni Stern**

The spring issue has been mailed/mailed. The summer issue deadline is May 1. Contact Jenni with any ideas for submissions. Anne noted that the USPS has thrown some hurdles in our way regarding the mailing of the hardcopy issues of the newsletter. Under our mailing permit, Barbara now has to travel to White Plains to mail the issue.

### **New Business—Erik Andersen**

Larry informed the board about the "Stand Up for Science" rally to be held in Washington Square Park on March 7. Anne reminded board members to sign up for the Annual Dinner.

### **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 8:17 PM.