

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**May 5, 2025 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, 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** and Office Manager **Barbara Daniel** were also present.

Absent: Tom McE., Kara, Steve, Tom R., Lynn, Richard, Jean, Jenni

Meeting started at 7:01 PM.

**President's Report—Erik Andersen**

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting. He continued that board members should note that there has been a change in the location of the board of directors meeting scheduled for September 8—it will be held at the Nature Center in Croton Point Park.

Erik called on Larry to update the board on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor, Haroush, 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 SMRA and the defendant's lawyer had agreed to engage in mediation to see if a settlement can be reached regarding monetary damages owed to SMRA. However, the mediation session was cut short by the mediator since Haroush's attorney was disputing condition. Another mediation session has been scheduled for May 12.

Previously, SMRA and Haroush had agreed that debris from Haroush's property that was dumped on SMRA property would be removed by Haroush. This was done in a manner that stripped the slope of all vegetation and exposed SMRA's property to further damage from erosion. We will alert the town about this matter since Westchester Tree Life has not gotten back to us about stabilizing the slope. Scott Cullen, consulting arborist, will revisit the damaged area this week to assess the viability of standing trees. As the trees are now leafing out, we will be able to get a clearer picture of the extent of damage to SMRA's trees.

Anne noted that the Town of New Castle is taking Haroush back to court for failing to adhere to court orders requiring soil testing on the disturbed property and for not creating and implementing a replanting plan.

Erik noted that \$25,000 has been spent to date on fees for SMRA's attorney and asked the board to approve further expenditures of up to an additional \$10,000.

Motion: To approve an additional expenditure of up to \$10,000 for fees for the attorney representing SMRA in the civil action filed by SMRA to recover damages to SMRA property by Dr. Yossi Haroush and Rebecca Marshall, owner of a property adjacent to SMRA's Pruyn Sanctuary. Motion by: Suzanne Kavic. Seconded by: Valerie Lyle. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik updated the board on the status of the potential absorption by SMRA of the territory of Central Westchester Audubon Society (CWAS). Things are progressing because CWAS has scheduled a meeting of its membership in which members will be asked to approve dissolution of the chapter and merger with SMRA. This meeting will be held on May 21 via Zoom. Results will be reported to the SMRA board at the board's June meeting.

We had a very successful Annual Dinner in April. Attendees seemed very pleased with the program and the venue. See the Treasurer's Report, below, for additional information.

Our next board meeting will be held on June 2, in conjunction with our annual picnic at Senasqua Park in Croton-on-Hudson. Anne thanked Val for securing the necessary permit from the Village.

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

[Reference Report: Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix and Investment Portfolio Performance For Period Ending April 1, 2025]

For our official quarterly report, as of April 1, 2025, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,424,474, a 2.5% (\$35,845) decrease below the January 1, 2025 balance of \$1,460,319. As of April 1, the three-month, one-year, three-year, five-year and ten-year investment rates of return were -1.5%, 6.0%, 5.0%, 10.6% and 6.8% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 0.2%, 4.2%, 3.7%, 8.2% and 4.9% for the same periods. There have been \$15,000 in withdrawals from, and \$0 in additions to, the portfolio during 2025. Following a very volatile month of April, the balance as of May 1, 2025 was \$1,421,537 which was down only 0.2% (\$2,937) for the month of April and down 2.7% (\$38,782) YTD. As of May 1, 2025, we are 32.4% (\$50,784) 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 04-30-25]

Revenues for the first third of the year are lower than for the same period last year. Some of that involves timing for receipt of a matching grant and larger trip donations in 2024 due to more trips at the start of the year (three last year vs. two trips this year).

However, both Annual Fund donations and membership renewals to date are lower this year than last. Hopefully those revenue streams will pick now that we've begun our annual fund drive.

This year's Quilt Raffle was exceptional, with \$2,075 received. In addition, the annual dinner at Travelers Rest netted \$2,291.

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

The Yellowstone trip in May is planned for 13 people (all paid to date); expenses show only a few deposits.

The June Coastal Birding trip has proved very popular with 18 sign-ups before registration was closed.

More legal expenses are expected for the civil action filed by SMRA against a Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor to recover damages to SMRA property. This is an "off budget" expense, and the board may need to discuss how much more money is approved for this project. (See President's Report, above.)

### **Membership Report—Suzanne Kavic**

[Reference Membership Report as of March 3, 2025.]

With the current 563 SMRA chapter member households and 494 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,056. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2025 stands at \$2,026 (2025 budgeted goal is \$13,055).

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

Anne noted we've entered the busy season for day and extended trips. Our day trips have attracted new people; cross publicity seems to be helping. In terms of outreach to local schools, we had an unfortunate cancellation because the school district that had scheduled the program (for Rockefeller State Park Preserve) failed to arrange for bus transportation. We hope to reschedule this program.

As was reported at the March board meeting, the reconstituted Connect Kids to Parks program is no longer paying for interpretive fees for programs held at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve (RSPP). As interpretive fees are reimbursable for most of the other parks in the Connect Kids program, this may have been an oversight on the part of New York State but the problem has yet to be rectified.

Anne has been working with Advocacy Committee member Dr. Laura Lennihan on the issue of outdoor placement of boxes containing rodenticides. This practice harms birds of prey who eat rodents who have consumed poisons from the boxes. It was noted that the rodenticides used are no longer allowed to be sold at retail, but commercial pest applicators can still use them. An email outreach will alert our members in the Town of New Castle about the placement of rodenticide boxes outside of public buildings in the Town. Several board members raised the question of why this outreach is being limited to one town. Anne said further outreach is possible, but the initial outreach will be limited to New Castle as Dr. Lennihan assesses the response of our members and evaluates how to proceed going forward. Anne suggested board members check out the website [rap-torsarethesolution.org](http://rap-torsarethesolution.org) for more information on this issue.

### **Advocacy Committee—Bill Kellner for Tom Ruth**

We can confirm the upcoming webinar on June 12th featuring Ben Goldfarb, author of *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*. Ben will discuss the need for wildlife crossings and the ecological impact of roads. Thanks to Ken for initiating this, and to Kathleen for making *Crossings* the current Nature Book Club read.

We continue to monitor horseshoe crab protection legislation: this is included in the proposed NYS Senate budget, so the path forward for legislation is not clear. We'll be following up with sponsor Senator Hoylman's staff after the budget period concludes to determine next steps in supporting this initiative. Additionally, SMRA has signed on to a letter being sent by the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition to the U.S. Marine Fisheries Commission urging increased protection at the federal level for horseshoe crabs.

We have received materials for promoting awareness and action to help homeowners address bird strikes, from a state-wide project presented at the Spring NY/CT Audubon Council Meeting in April. Materials include a PowerPoint presentation with talking points for each slide on the problem and how to make your home more bird friendly, and brochures on mitigation remedies, "This is a Bird Friendly House" yard signs, etc. We will be discussing using these for an in-person meeting or webinar, and in the meantime, these are available for use at any tabling event.

As mentioned in the Executive Director's report above, a new concern for our committee is the use of rodenticides in our communities. Dr. Laura Lennihan and Anne created informational materials for the Earth Day event on April 27th at Gedney Park to educate the public on this issue.

We're also tracking several environmental developments in our region. We're monitoring the Sterling Forest development proposal to build a 200-student residential college within Sterling Forest, to make sure they do the required environmental due diligence. And we're keeping tabs on the Packaging Reduction Recycling Infrastructure Act.

Bill is preparing an article on grassland habitat conservation for our fall newsletter.

And a shout-out to Kathleen and Films on Purpose for coordinating a screening of *Tides and Time*, a documentary about climate change impacts.

Our next committee meeting is scheduled for May 29th.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim for Tom McEnerney**

There's a very limited amount of seed left in the shed. While seed in the shell like black oil sunflower should last for a while, growth of mold on shelled seeds is a concern. Board members should consider purchasing from our remaining stock, especially considering prices next year will be significantly higher.

### **Sanctuaries—Michael Madias**

The following summarizes recent boundary walks in our sanctuaries:

March 8, 2025—Pruyn (second walk) with Anne, Michael

March 21, 2025—Choate with Anne, Michael, Tom R.

March 28, 2025—Haas with Anne, Michael

April 15, 2025—Pinecliff with Anne, Michael, Lynn.

Due to swampy conditions, walks at our Cameron-Murtfeldt and Chernick Sanctuaries will be deferred until next winter.

Boundary walks at Pruyun Sanctuary determined that a sanctuary neighbor had placed flood lights on trees on SMRA property. These lights are shining into the sanctuary. The neighbor's lawn now extends across the property line onto SMRA property. We would like to get a survey to clearly delineate this boundary and then take steps to remove these encroachments. A workday to move rocks along the staked border will be scheduled following completion of the survey.

Motion: To approve an expenditure of \$650 for a survey to delineate the boundary of Pruyun Sanctuary with the Sultanik property at 243 Millwood Road. Motion by: Suzanne Kavic. Seconded by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

The following summarizes recent sanctuary work days:

April 25, 2025—planting wild flowers in the meadow at Brinton Brook (30 hyssop and 25 daisy fleabane plants)

May 2, 2025—Croton Cub Scouts family work day. Moved sticks off trail, cleaned up litter, scrubbed trail signs.

### **Pruyn House—Erik Andersen**

New contracts for fuel oil and service from Burke Energy had significant price increases. Proposed fuel oil prices are well above current market value. We will not renew these contracts. We are considering a proposal for fuel and service from Check Oil as these would offer considerable savings.

We will be installing two garage doors at Pruyun House that have been received from an anonymous donor.

### **Pruyn Gardens—Mark Magel**

The gardens are waking up with the coming of spring. Our initial garden cleanup workday was held on April 30th. We had good weather and a dedicated group of garden volunteers. We'll continue our spring work on May 14, with a volunteer day in which weeding will be a focus. On May 28 we will conduct a second planting

and install bamboo fencing. Overall, our major plantings from last season are doing well. We are looking to install informational signs in the gardens later in the summer (see Pruyn Gardens report in the minutes of the March 3rd board meeting).

**Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim**

Anne called attention to the list of upcoming field trips listed in the agenda for tonight's meeting and in the online calendar on the SMRA website. On June 17, Kathleen will lead the SMRA Nature Book Club's discussion (on Zoom) of Ben Goldfarb's *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*.

Anne thanked Val for revitalizing SMRA participation in Project FeederWatch at the Croton Point Park Nature Center. Val said this has been an enjoyable experience.

Mitch asked about the status of Doodletown in Bear Mountain State Park. Anne said the area remains closed due to flood damage. We are looking into scheduling a birding walk at the nearby Jones Point area.

**Newsletter—Anne Swaim for Jenni Stern**

We are currently doing the layout for the summer issues. The deadline for our fall issue is August 1.

**Adjournment—Erik Andersen**

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:03 PM.