

Saw Mill River Audubon
June 2, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting held at Senasqua Park, Croton-on-Hudson, NY

Present (in **bold type**): **Erik Andersen, Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin**, Mitchell Goldfarb, **Philip Heidelberg**, 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**. SMRA Executive Director **Anne Swaim**, SMRA Office Manager **Barbara Daniel**. **Guests present were** President Lisa Curtis of Central Westchester Audubon Society (CWAS) and CWAS Vice President Chris Mignone.

Absent: Mitch, Suzanne, Kara, Lynn, Richard

Meeting started at 7:05 PM.

President's Report—Erik Andersen

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting.

Erik, after asking if there were any changes to be made to the minutes of the March 3 and May 5 board meetings, called for a motion to approve the minutes of the meetings as circulated.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors' meetings held on March 3 and May 5, 2025 and as circulated. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Ginger Bernardin. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik thanked everyone involved in organizing tonight's picnic, especially our dedicated grill masters, Rudy Fasciani and Greg and Michael Madias.

Attention was called to the agenda for tonight's meeting, which lists upcoming meetings of the board of directors. Our next meeting will be held on September 8 at the Croton Point Park Nature Center. Subsequent meetings will be held on Zoom until March 2, 2026 when we'll meet in person at the Croton Free Library. Our Annual Dinner will be a pot luck next year. The scheduled date is April 12. We're not sure of the dinner's location as we are bumping up against the maximum capacity of the room we've used at Mariandale. Board members are requested to let Anne know if there are any suggestions for a possible Annual Dinner venue.

Erik read the following letter from Mike Burger, Executive Director of Audubon New York in which chapters are requested to approve slates of candidates for Directors of the Council Board:

"In accordance with the By Laws, the Nominating Committee of the Board of Directors presented the following slate at the Spring 2025 Council Meeting held in Glens Falls, N.Y. in April of 2025. Ballots must be returned no later than June 30, 2025, to be counted by the Executive Director of the State Office of the National Audubon Society who shall be responsible for communicating the results to the Board members and the President of the member Chapters by Oct 15, 2025.

The following Directors of the Council Board have been nominated for a term of two years for the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2027:

Leslie Brill (Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society)

Jessica Wilson (NYC Bird Alliance)

The following Directors of the Council Board have been nominated for an additional term of two years for the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2027:

Alison Kocek (Onondaga Audubon Society)

Mikayla Ploof (Northern NY Audubon Society)

Dennis Riordan (Menunkatuck Audubon Society - CT)

Nominations for officers of the Board of Directors for a term of two years for the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2027:

Chair: Susan O'Handley (Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society)

Vice-Chair: Jennifer Wilson Pines (North Shore Audubon Society).”

Erik asked for a motion to approve the slates of candidates as read.

Motion: To approve the slates of candidates for directors of the Audubon New York Council Board enumerated in the letter read by Erik Andersen from Mike Burger, Executive Director of Audubon New York.

Motion by: Ken Novenstern. Seconded by: Tom Ruth. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik introduced our two guest from CWAS: President Lisa Curtis and Vice President Chris Mignone, noting that CWAS held an annual meeting via Zoom and voted to dissolve the chapter and merge assets with SMRA. SMRA will be reaching out to the CWAS membership this summer. The process of incorporating the CWAS zip codes will be pending administrative action by National Audubon.

Membership Report—Erik Andersen for Suzanne Kavic

[Reference Membership Report as of June 2, 2025.]

With the current 575 SMRA chapter member households and 473 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,048. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2025 stands at \$4,346 (2025 budgeted goal is \$13,055).

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

[Reference Report: Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix and Investment Portfolio Performance

As of June 1, 2025, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,476,834 which is an increase of 1.1% (\$16,515) above the January 1, 2025 balance of \$1,460,319 and an increase of 3.9% (\$55,297) for the month of May.

There have been no additions to, and \$15,000 of withdrawals from, the endowment during 2025. As of June 1, 2025, we are 38.8% (\$60,829) 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—Bill Kellner for Lynn Salmon

[Reference Report: SMRA Operating Revenue and Expenses YTD 05/31/25)

Our Annual Fund Drive letters make a difference—donations increased from \$1,400 in April 2025 to \$13,660 in May 2025 thanks to your letter writing efforts. These revenue numbers are a bit lower than last year, when we received \$18,532 in May 2024.

We have an increase in trip donations this year thanks to raising the donation amount from \$200 to \$300 per person. Trip expenses shown are not yet final.

And Cary's Birding Tea this year was a spectacular success despite our weather worries, netting \$1,280.

Expenses all look to be as expected based on the budget, and/or last year's numbers with no large, unexpected charges hitting us so far this year.

An additional retainer of \$5,000 was recently paid to our attorney and included in the Pruyn boundary civil action total.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Anne called on Larry to update the board on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor, Dr. Yossi Haroush, who was found guilty in August 2024 by the Town of New Castle for tree removal and steep slope violations and is the subject of a related civil action filed by SMRA to recover damages to SMRA property. The civil action is continuing; we are in the damage assessment phase following the default judgment in favor of SMRA, although the defendant is attempting to have the default judgment overturned. Both sides agreed to mediation to assess damages, but an initial meeting of the parties did not result in any agreement; scheduling of a second attempt at mediation with the court-appointed mediator may be attempted.

Previously, SMRA and Dr. Haroush had agreed that debris from Dr. Haroush's property that was dumped on SMRA property would be removed by Dr. Haroush. This was done in a manner that stripped the slope of all vegetation and exposed SMRA's property to further damage from erosion. Three trees on SMRA property are dead and others have been damaged. SMRA's arborist will assess the situation again midsummer. We will contact the town to pursue assessment of the exposed slope; this would be a part of the assessment of damages as would killing and damage to trees on SMRA property.

Anne noted that Dr. Haroush has not fully complied with court-ordered remedies to rectify violations as determined in the criminal proceedings brought by the Town of New Castle. The court gave Dr. Haroush 30 days to comply with its rulings. A hearing in Town of New Castle Justice Court to assess compliance is scheduled for June 26. Several board members expressed interest in attending. Anne will remind board members in advance if this court event is still held on this date.

Advocacy Committee—Tom Ruth

We're looking forward to our 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. (See also Nature Book Club, below.)

Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney

Most of our inventory of seed has been sold. Only 20 bags of black oil sunflower seed are left in the shed.

Sanctuaries—Michael Madias

Boundary walks at Pruyn 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 have hired a surveyor to clearly delineate this boundary; survey work is scheduled for June 30. Following completion of the survey we plan to take steps to remove any encroachments on SMRA property and to mark the line with rocks on our side of the boundary. A workday will be scheduled following completion of the survey.

Pruyn Gardens—Mark Magel

All our gardens are doing well as spring is progressing into summer. All the recent plantings in the Meadow and Pruy House Gardens are thriving.

We're delighted to report that we have two new volunteers to help with garden chores. Our recent volunteer workday, in which we planned to concentrate on weeding, was rained out. Fortunately, weeds are not out of control, and we should be able to get a handle on this at our next workday, scheduled for June 25. *Anemone canadensis* is the main weedy species we are seeing this year.

We're looking forward to having the Pruy Gardens participate in this year's pollinator tour, to take place in July. We could use several board members on the tour day to help greet the visiting public.

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. We'll head south tomorrow as we begin our multi-destination coastal birding trip with stops on the Jersey shore and Delmarva Peninsula. On June 28 we've scheduled a field trip to Nickerson Beach on Long Island where we're sure to see a good variety of shorebirds.

Anne called on Cary to report on last weekend's fundraising Birding Tea that she hosted at her home. The event was very successful. Attendees had a great time, and donations are still coming in beyond the \$1,280 noted in the Treasurer's Report, above.

SMRA Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

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*. We're excited to report that Ben will join our Book Club discussion as well as participating in the June 12 webinar (see Advocacy Committee report, above).

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

The deadline for our fall issue is August 1. This issue will be printed and mailed to our membership, including the newly acquired list from CWAS. Digital distribution of the newsletter will resume with the winter issue.

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 7:33 PM.