

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**December 1, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)**  
**Meeting held on Zoom**

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, Kenneth Novenster, Steve Rappaport, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Jean Sparacin, Jennifer Stern, Larry Trachtenberg, Kathleen Williamson.** SMRA Executive Director **Anne Swaim** was also present.

Absent: Mitch, Jean

Meeting started at 7:01 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 October 6 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 meetings held on October 6, 2025 and as circulated.  
Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Tom Ruth. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the agenda for tonight's meeting, which has the schedule of upcoming board meetings for the first half of 2026.

Erik informed the board that he has accepted a temporary assignment with the Museum of Danish America requiring him to be onsite at the museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. The length of Erik's absence is indeterminate. Although offering to take a leave of absence, he said that he is available to conduct SMRA business via Zoom, telephone or email. No board members objected to Erik's continuing to serve as president while he remains in Iowa.

Erik reported on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor, Dr. Yossi 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. In light of the court ruling voiding the default judgement in SMRA's favor, the subcommittee dealing with this issue recommended that SMRA stop pursuing the civil action against Dr. Haroush. With only three trees determined to have died as a result of Dr. Haroush's actions, the probability of SMRA being awarded meaningful monetary damages are very low; the subcommittee determined that spending additional funds on attorney's fees was pointless.

The Executive Committee affirmed the subcommittee's recommendation to terminate further legal action. Larry noted that Dr. Haroush did perform remediation of some of the damage to SMRA property, including removing the brush pile and bulldozed slope. Tom McE. asked what were SMRA's total expenses related to the civil action. Lynn replied that we've spent \$34,973, most of which was for attorney's fees (apx \$32,000).

Erik reminded the board that our 2026 Annual Dinner will be a potluck held at Mariandale in Ossining on April 29 at 5:00 PM. Anne noted that we were unable to find a new venue that could accommodate the numbers we are expecting and that Mariandale had no availability on weekends.

Anne continued that Barbara has mailed packets to all board members with letters to be PS'd for the end-of-year follow-up fund drive. The letters are going to past supporters who have not contributed yet this year. The list of recipients has been expanded to include anyone who has donated \$200 or more in the past four years. Quilt raffle tickets for board members to sell have been included in the packet. Board members are urged to mail their letters as soon as possible.

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

For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2025, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,564,439, a 3.5% (\$53,439) increase for the third quarter and a 7.1% (\$104,102) increase above the January 1, 2025 balance of \$1,460,319. As of October 1, the three-month, YTD, one-year, three-year, five-year and ten-year investment rates of return were 5.2%, 11.2%, 11.8%, 15.3%, 9.4% and 8.8% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 4.4%, 9.1%, 8.0%, 10.7%, 6.9% and 6.2% for the same periods. As of December 1st, the portfolio balance is \$1,560,446 which is up 6.9% (\$100,127) YTD but down 1.4% (\$22,636) for the month of November. There have been \$87,674 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio during 2025. As of December 1, 2025, we are 96% (\$142,910) 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 2026 Budget]

Legal and other expenses from Pruyn Boundary issue with Haroush  
Pruyn Boundary total expenses beginning on 11/1/2023 ending 11/30/2025:

Legal : \$32,124.12

Other: 2,849.60 (soil test and arborist consult)

Total: \$34,973.72

Lynn presented the proposed 2026 annual budget compiled by the Budget Committee, noting that it was the result of many worksheets and subcommittees meeting during November to estimate Revenues and Expenses for calendar year 2026. The Budget Committee of Lynn, Erik, Val, Suzanne, Phil, and Anne met on November 21 to review and finalize the numbers shown in the 2026 Budget. Lynn thanked the chairs of all the committees for providing expenditure estimates for 2026. Detailed worksheets showing how budget numbers were calculated are available to any board members who would like to see them.

Larry noted that 2025 donations seem to be low. Lynn replied that we can expect more donations to come in during December and that many people make their donations at year-end. Anne will do a donation solicitation to the full email list this month.

Anne was excused for a few minutes for the board to discuss and vote on proposed Executive Director compensation for next year.

Motion: To approve Executive Director compensation proposed by the Budget Committee. Motion by: Phil Heidelberger. Seconded by: Suzanne Kavic. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Anne rejoined the meeting.

Motion: To approve the 2026 Budget as presented by the Budget Committee. Motion by: Lynn Salmon. Seconded by: Valerie Lyle. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

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

[Reference Membership Report as of November 26, 2025.]

With the current 594 SMRA chapter member households and 813 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,407. Transfer of joint NAS/CWAS and CWAS chapter member households to SMRA accounts for the increase in member numbers. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2025 stands at \$9,473 (2025 budgeted goal is \$13,055). Larry asked how many new members came in from CWAS. Anne said she did not have an exact count at the moment but estimated the number is approximately 350–400.

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

Another Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor, the Sultaniks, who have encroached on sanctuary property as detailed in the minutes of the June and September board meetings has been cited by the Town of New Castle for code violations regarding the improper installation of flood lights. The neighbor will need to apply for an Electrical Permit in advance of properly reinstalling lights on his side of the property line; the lights will need to shine inward, i.e., away from SMRA property and be moved if not on Sultaniks property (as most are currently attached to trees on SMRA property). Anne is planning to join the code inspector for the Town of New Castle when he walks the boundary between SMRA's and the neighbor's properties to assess compliance.

Upcoming trips include Ohio's Magee Marsh, scheduled for May 17–22, 2026. Charlie Roberto and Anne will lead. We expect this trip to be fully subscribed.

We've had discussions on planning a return to the Gaspé region of Québec to take place June 3–11, 2026. SMRA is not currently planning to sponsor this trip, rather it will probably be a "friends" trip to be coordinated by Charlie Roberto.

The annual Christmas Bird Counts begin December 20 with the Peekskill count. See the event calendar on the SMRA website for details on this and the other regional count circles.

We're planning a return visit to Panama for November 2026 for those who could not go on our initial visits. We'll start advertising this adventure after the New Year.

SMRA's Members' Best evening celebration of member photography will take place on December 10. The photo submission deadline has been extended to December 8. Join us for some holiday cheer and fellowship as we view the year's best wildlife photography.

Anne has been working with Lisa Curtis, former president of Central Westchester Audubon, to provide data for our chapter annual report to the National Audubon Society. This is a bit tricky as there is no longer a working portal for CWAS to submit a report. Anne is planning to incorporate annual report data from CWAS as an addendum to the annual report data submitted by SMRA to NAS.

In response to Erik's question, Anne said sales of the 2026 SMRA Calendar are going well. Kathleen said she would talk to the owner of the Village Bookstore in Pleasantville about having our calendars for sale.

## **Advocacy Committee—Erik Andersen for Tom Ruth**

The Horseshoe Crab Protection Act, which passed in the state legislature in late 2024, was vetoed by Governor Hochul. A revised bill passed in the 2025 legislative session. While awaiting the governor's decision, we are supporting a concerted effort to influence her to sign the bill. SMRA's upcoming email program announcement will include information about how to call the governor to urge her to sign the bill.

Tom reported on a conference he attended that was sponsored by the Pace University Elisabeth Haub School of Law Environmental Law Group on rodenticides and their impact on wildlife. The Environmental Law Group is advocating regulating the use of rodenticides at the state level and is drafting proposed legislation. Advocacy Committee member Dr. Laura Lennihan is leading the Committee's efforts to inform the public about the dangers to raptors and other wildlife posed by indiscriminate use of rodenticides.

Tom asked Kathleen to discuss the showing of the film "Tide and Time—An Intimate Portrait of Jamaica Bay's 85-year Old Guardian." The film showing and follow-up discussion took place on November 12 at the Chapqua Library. The event was well attended and received rave reviews from the audience.

The Committee's next program will be a Zoom webinar that will take place on February 18. The program, enti-

tled “Are Invasive Plants Really Bad for Birds—It Depends?,” will feature Chad Seewagen, Executive Director of the Great Hollow Preserve & Ecological Center.

Finally, Tom reported that Suzanne has done research on the issue of proposals to place thousands of mirrors into earth orbit to increase the amount of daylight on the earth’s surface with the goal of increasing energy production, among other things. The Committee will continue to follow this issue, which has the potential to cause serious harm to wildlife. One company, Reflect Orbital, has a proposal before the FCC to place 4,000 mirrors into earth orbit.

#### **Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney**

Our upcoming seed sale/pickup day is scheduled for December 21, please let the office know if you can help at the sale. So far Michael and Tom have volunteered. Kathleen and Michael have volunteered to help on the January sale day. Tom noted that we did increase prices for this year’s sale due to price increases on the part of our supplier.

#### **Sanctuaries—Michael Madias**

SMRA’s annual deer management program is going well this autumn. To date our vetted hunters have harvested five deer—three at Brinton Brook and two at Pruyn.

#### **SMRA Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson**

We’re tentatively scheduled to meet on Zoom on February 17 to discuss David Quammen’s *Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*. We’re excited to have two special guests: David Quammen and John Rasmus. John, a former editor-in-chief of *Outside* magazine, began publishing Quammen’s work in 1981.

#### **Project FeederWatch—Valerie Lyle**

FeederWatch continues Sunday morning’s at the Croton Point Park Nature Center. Along with six or seven regular attendees we’ve had visits from around 16 people. We’ve been able to introduce these new attendees to SMRA. FeederWatch provides a relaxed and friendly setting to sit inside and view the birds at the feeders outside the center’s windows.

#### **Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The deadline for our spring issue is February 1.

#### **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 8:14 PM.