

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**February 9, 2026 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**, **Jennifer Stern**, **Larry Trachtenberg**, **Kathleen Williamson**. SMRA Executive Director **Anne Swaim** was also present.

Absent: Cary, Michael, Mark, Ken, Steve

Meeting started at 7:02 PM.

**President's Report—Erik Andersen**

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting. After asking if there were any changes to be made to the minutes of the January 5, 2026 board meeting, he 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 January 5, 2026 and as circulated.  
Motion by: Tom Ruth. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the dates for upcoming meetings of the board of directors listed at the bottom of the agenda for tonight's meeting, noting that the March 2 meeting has been changed from in person to Zoom. The May 4 meeting will be in person at the Croton Free Library.

A Sunday time slot has become available at Mariandale for our Annual Dinner. The rescheduled date is now April 26. Space limitations necessitate capping attendance at 100. Erik reminded board members to continue to sell tickets for the quilt raffle to be held at the dinner.

Jean Sparacin has retired from the board of directors after 20 years of service. We look forward to honoring Jean at the Annual Dinner.

Increasing the print run of our annual fund raising calendar has paid off. We have a net profit of approximately \$1,400. We've been able to distribute calendars for sale at local book shops and as a thank you gift to our larger donors.

**Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

[Reference Report: Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix January 1, 2026 *and* Investment Portfolio Performance Report as of December 31, 2025]

For our official quarterly report, as of January 1, 2026, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,571,830, a 0.5% (\$7,391) increase for the fourth quarter and a 7.6% (\$111,511) increase above the January 1, 2025 balance of \$1,460,319. As of January 1, the three month, one-year, three-year, five-year and ten-year investment rates of return were 2.5%, 14.0%, 14.0%, 7.7% and 8.8% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 2.0%, 11.3%, 10.0%, 5.7% and 6.3% for the same periods. There were \$87,674 in withdrawals from, and \$0 in additions to, the portfolio during 2025. As of February 1, 2026, the portfolio balance is \$1,590,678, which is up 1.2% (\$18,848) YTD. As of February 1, we are 72.8% (\$136,133) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking, short-term CDs and money market funds.

Erik, thanking the Finance Committee, noted that, despite the erratic nature of current markets, SMRA's returns have been impressive and that the Committee's investment allocation has served the organization well.

### **Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon**

[Reference reports: SMRA Operating Revenue and Expenses YTD–02-06-26; Bird Seed Seasonal Summary; Credit Card Fees]

First, a recap for end of 2025 numbers that weren't final at our January board meeting. We received nearly \$35,000 in donations last December (39% of our donations for the entire year). For comparison, May + June brought in a little over \$28,000 (32%) after our Fund Drive letters.

We're now at the beginning of the year when revenue numbers are at their lowest, but nothing to be worried about. Seed sales remain strong this cold winter and we reordered a small amount of additional seed in January. The SMRA annual budget does not adequately reflect profit/loss from seed sales since we continue to sell seed purchased last fall.

Lynn called attention to the alternate table (Bird Seed Seasonal Summary), which was part of tonight's meeting package distributed to board members. This summary more accurately reflects the seasonal nature of our seed sales. As you can see, net profit for seed deliveries in fall 2023 and fall 2024 were similar despite fluctuating seed prices between the two years. We still have ongoing sales of fall 2025 seed in the shed, and anticipate no additional expenses, so we can expect another profitable year.

Tom McE. noted our 2024–25 seed sale profit is approximately \$7,300 when we factor in the use of \$1,300 worth of seed for the Pruyin Sanctuary and Project FeederWatch. Lynn commented that cost of seed used at Pruyin and FeederWatch is categorized as a Seed Sale expense. Erik questioned whether we should account for seed used at Pruyin under Sanctuary expenses. Val added that we might consider expensing seed used for FeederWatch under Programs. Tom McE. replied that the Budget Committee would take up this question of how to account for seed used in the sanctuaries and programs. He also noted that we've had to purchase additional seed to keep up with high demand this cold winter.

Expenses for January look to be where we expect them when compared to this time last year. There's a slight uptick in Pruyin House expenses due to additional snow plowing needs this winter.

Anne just returned from a January 2026 Birding trip to New Mexico with nine participants. There are still a few outstanding expenses and reimbursements from participants on that trip before those numbers are final.

We have eight participants each making deposits of \$500 and another \$300 deposit for the May Magee Marsh trip. And, our Annual Dinner this year on April 26 will be a potluck at Mariandale. We've begun taking reservations at \$10 per person.

We had a discussion about the amount SMRA is paying for credit card fees. Lynn reviewed this for 2024 and 2025 (see Credit Card Fees spreadsheet). We take in approximately \$30,000 per year with credit cards, and are currently paying 10-11% back in fees to our provider (EVO Merchant Services).

We made an administrative decision to cancel this service. Members can still pay with credit cards by using Paypal and entering a credit card number if they don't have a Paypal account (fees are approximately 3%). We take online payments with Zelle, which has zero fees.

If necessary, we can look into finding a different Merchant Service Provider with better rates (e.g., Square or Stripe), but it is not clear we need this since Paypal, which we already have set up, can serve as our Merchant Service Provider for taking credit cards.

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

[Reference Membership Report as of February 9, 2026.]

With the current 595 SMRA chapter member households and 839 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,434. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships totaled \$12,350 in calendar year 2025; the year-to-date revenue for 2026 is \$560 while the budgeted goal for 2026 is \$13,020.

Anne noted that the 36 CWAS chapter members that were on the books at the time of CWAS' dissolution were given SMRA chapter member status through the end of 2025. We are in the process of sending these chapter members renewal invoices.

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

EagleFest has been rescheduled for February 14. Most of our many volunteers will be able to fill the time slots they had committed to for February 7 and we've picked up some new volunteers.

The recently completed New Mexico birding trip was a great success. We tallied 139 species, saw some spectacular scenery and had great weather. Several board members who were on the trip confirmed that they had a great time.

The upcoming trip to Ohio's Magee Marsh (May 17–21) still has a few openings. We have scheduled our return to Panamá (we've booked the Canopy Tower/Lodge/Camp) November 10–21 but have yet to submit our deposit. A final decision about whether to go forward with this trip and send in the downpayment will need to be made by the end of this month.

Board members are requested to fill out and email the annual Conflict of Interest statement that was part of tonight's meeting packet. Tom McE. pointed out that state law requires that all board members submit this form.

Anne said there is little new to report about the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor who has encroached on sanctuary property and has been cited by the Town of New Castle for code violations regarding the improper installation of flood lights. Anne is trying to arrange a site visit to this area on the border of Pruyn Sanctuary and this neighbor's property with the Town of New Castle's zoning enforcement official and environmental inspector.

Anne has scheduled a meeting with Mehta Pandey, Bedford Audubon's new Executive Director.

Ryan Portnoy of Dobbs Ferry, our 2026 Larry Light Scholarship winner, has submitted very strong references in support of his application, which has been approved by the Executive Committee. Ryan will be attending Hog Island Audubon Camp. Anne will send the details about this application to the full board.

### **Advocacy Committee—Tom Ruth**

Tom called on Val to report on the January 31 program held at Teatown and co-sponsored by SMRA and Teatown, “the Wonders and Perils of Bird Migration” featuring Greg Repasz of Lights Out Connecticut. Val said this was an informative session focusing on the effects of artificial lighting on the migration of birds and other species. Materials were provided to attendees to enable them to host follow-up programs on this issue. Greg indicated his availability to host a program for SMRA.

We have almost 40 people registered for our February 18 program, “Are Invasive Plants Really Bad for Birds—It Depends?,” featuring Chad Seewagen, Executive Director of the Great Hollow Preserve & Ecological Center. Anne noted that our upcoming email blast scheduled for February 11 will promote this program.

We’re continuing to advocate on the issue of the serious harm to raptors caused by outdoor bait boxes used for rodent control. The Environmental Law Group at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University is drafting state-level legislation to regulate use of these bait boxes. The Advocacy Committee is looking to meet with the Environmental Law Group to discuss how we can support efforts to pass this legislation.

Tom and Ken have had a discussion with State Senator Pete Harckham about prospects for reintroducing the Wildlife Crossings legislation previously vetoed by Governor Hochul. Jenni is following efforts to pass the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act in the state legislature.

### **Nominating Committee—Bill Kellner**

SMRA’s annual election for the board of directors and officers will take place at the next meeting of the SMRA board. We’re pleased to confirm that all current board members with terms expiring in 2026 have indicated that they would like to run for new three-year terms, and all current officers have said they would like to stand for a new one-year term. With Jean’s resignation (see President’s report above), we have six vacancies on the board of directors. We are hoping to vet one or two new board candidates prior to the upcoming election.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney**

Volunteers are needed for the upcoming weekend seed sale day (February 15).

### **Sanctuaries Committee—Anne Swaim for Michael Madias**

Things are quiet in the sanctuaries, which are lying under a blanket of snow.

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

Anne displayed the schedule for SMRA volunteers at the various EagleFest locations. The discussion covered set up and packing up of SMRA exhibit materials at George’s Island and the Croton River boat ramp as well as the revised volunteer schedule at the main exhibit tent.

Anne called on Val to report on Project FeederWatch. Val said that despite having two sessions cancelled due to snow in January, FeederWatch continues to be fun and popular. Board members are encouraged to attend and help identify birds at the feeders (especially various winter sparrows) from the comfort of the Nature Center.

**SMRA Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson**

David Quammen's *Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions* is our current selection. We're excited to have two special guests at our February 17 Zoom program on this book: author David Quammen and John Rasmus. John, a former editor-in-chief of *Outside* magazine, began publishing Quammen's work in 1981.

**Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

The deadline for our spring issue was February 1. The issue is currently in production.

**Adjournment—Erik Andersen**

Motion: Erik shall adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Jenni Stern. Seconded by: Ginger Bernardin. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively). Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:03 PM.