

Adopting Gender-Neutral Language: Proposed Changes to the Society for Freshwater Science By-Laws

1 March 2022

A proposal prepared by the Early Career and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Committees

Background and Rationale

Over the course of our activities in serving early career members, we noticed the Society's current By-Laws include the use of gendered pronouns to reference the Society's members. While the current language clearly avoids assumptions of female and male roles, as has been the standard for many years, norms have recently shifted to adopt recognition of non-binary language in reference to gender in order to reinforce inclusivity and reaffirm non-binary gender identities.

To address these concerns, the Early Career Committee solicited the input of SFS's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (JEDI) Committee to provide an opinion on the most appropriate replacement for gendered language in our Society's By-Laws. The proposed changes will directly support SFS's Strategic Goals 3 and 4, which encourage diversity among SFS members as well as the greater community of freshwater science practitioners. These updates will further contribute indirectly to Goals 5-7 by demonstrating commitment to support existing members and broadening membership appeal to a greater and more inclusive audience.

On behalf of the Early Career and JEDI Committees, we are pleased to present these proposed changes, which include 10 instances of gendered pronoun use. Per the recommendations of the JEDI committee, we propose gender-neutral replacements for this language throughout (e.g., 'their'). We believe this small, but important change will contribute to SFS's ongoing commitment to building a more inclusive and welcoming society by removing microaggressions. The changes will further signify SFS's support for marginalized or historically excluded groups by ensuring the language officially governing our Society appropriately represents the past, current, and future members of the Society for Freshwater Science.

We thank you for your consideration of these updates to our Society's By-Laws. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out. We are happy to further discuss the proposed changes.

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Proposed By-Law Changes

Article 2. Officers, Delegates, and Appointed Official – Section 4

Current text: “...not alter in any way his/her normal term...”

Suggested text: “...not alter in any way their normal term ...”

Article 3. Board – Section 1

Current text: “...liaison between his or her represented...”

Suggested text: “...liaison between their represented...”

Article 3. Board – Section 3

Current text: “...will hold office until her/his successor has...”

Suggested text: “...will hold office until their successor has ...”

Article 5. Standing Committees – Section 3

Current text: “...in the third (3rd) year of his/her current term...”

Suggested text: “...in the third (3rd) year of their current term ...”

Article 11. Registered Agent

Current text: “...Committee and his/her term of office...”

Suggested text: “...Committee and their term of office ...”

Article 12. Files and Records

Current text: “...by any member or his/her agent or attorney...” [2 occurrences]

Suggested text: “...by any member or their agent or attorney...”

Article 14. Conflict of Interests

Current text: “...prompt and full disclosure of his/her interest to the Board...”

Suggested text: “...prompt and full disclosure of their interest to the Board ...”

AND

Current text: “...vote on, nor use his/her personal influence on...”

Suggested text: “...vote on, nor use their personal influence on ...”

Article 14. Conflict of Interests

Current text: “...prompt and full disclosure of his/her interest to the Board...”

Suggested text: “...prompt and full disclosure of their interest to the Board ...”