

Rationale SFS Increased Dues For 2026

2025-04-15

The Society of Freshwater Science is an organization driven by its membership. Members volunteer their time to organize meetings, publish in our nonprofit journal, and support initiatives to broaden participation in freshwater science. We thank you for contributing to SFS to build a healthy and vibrant Society!

To maintain and strengthen SFS operations that allow our members to do these things, the SFS Board of Directors (BoD) discussed and voted at the December 2024 Board Meeting to increase Society dues to meet increasing Society operational expenses. The new rates proposed would apply for the 2026 membership year, if approved by SFS membership. This proposed change requires a vote by the entire Society at the Business Lunch at the annual meeting to be held in May 2025 in Puerto Rico.

As a small society, membership dues have always been the primary income for operations. We also have some investment income. However, this is not enough to support the growth and mission of our Society. **We have not increased dues since 2018** and we now propose to do so by 0% to ~90% depending on your member category.

Here's why: Over the last five years, the proportion of operating expenses paid for by revenue from membership dues has fallen from 92% in 2021, to ~59% in 2025 (budget projection), which is not sustainable. The goal for the proposed dues increase was targeted to ensure that membership dues cover at least 75% of our core operating expenses (assuming ~1,500 members), with the remainder expected to come from investment income. The BoD, together with the Finance Committee, determined that the proposed split is sustainable over the longer term. Core operating expenses were defined based on costs for administrative functions, membership services, and journal expenses paid directly from the Society's operating account. Our meetings are planned and budgeted to balance costs to attend with the desire to make our meeting as accessible to our members as possible, not to make a profit. As a result of following this goal, the financial performance of our meetings from year-to-year is variable and results in performance ranging from losses to gains.

There are multiple factors that have influenced our need to consider this proposed dues increase:

1. The recent history of high inflation rates has made this increase necessary.
2. SFS recently selected a new membership services organization (ASN) that is expected to provide greatly improved services to the Society. We expect members to see the benefits of this transition soon, if not already. However, costs of membership services have substantially increased since our prior contract with USU, our past membership services provider.

3. SFS has programs to support students and Early Career members (Instars, Headwaters Leadership Academy, and others). These programs are interwoven with our Society and require a level of sustained commitment so that the Society can continue to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice activities as part of our Society's goals and mission.
4. SFS members receive a subscription to the Society Journal, *Freshwater Science*, which is published by a not-for-profit press (Univ of Chicago Press). Costs to produce the Journal continue to increase.
5. SFS contracts for two part-time, key positions (Executive Director and Communications Specialist) to provide continuity for our volunteer leadership structure. We need to recognize and support annual cost of living and merit-based performance adjustments to compensation.
6. SFS supports a series of small funding requests each year to advance initiatives led by our members (e.g., Innovation Awards, dispersed by our Long Range Planning Committee). This source of funding depends on investment income. Currently, a greater and greater proportion of this investment income is supporting general Society business activities and diminishing the funding available to support these initiatives. The increase in dues will ensure these important initiatives can continue.

Rationale for Rate Structure: In crafting the proposed dues increase, SFS leadership aimed to maximize accessibility and minimize impact to our lowest-income members by disproportionately increasing dues for higher-income members. Specifically, dues for students and for members from developing countries will remain unchanged. We aimed to ensure that student membership continues to be a strong component of the Society, and that developing country membership continues to grow. For other members, the increase is weighted on a sliding scale to increase with income. The increase is \$30 for members with income <\$50K and the increase is \$120 for members with income over \$150K (see Table 1). A new category to our existing rate structure was added for members earning over \$150K, with the idea they are most likely to afford to pay more. Further, Emeritus members will now pay \$45 (currently \$0), with the idea that they can afford to pay a small amount that covers member services. We recognize that some increases are higher than the rate of inflation over the last several years, and this is designed to ensure accessible rates for those that can least afford an increase.

Considerations: The dues for SFS membership for some members will now be higher than several other, similar science societies. However, SFS, unlike many other societies, maintains a not-for-profit society journal and we have a long-term commitment to ensure that our journal is performant and solvent. We also organize and budget for our annual meeting to be cost neutral to keep registration as low as possible, rather

than using the meeting to generate a profit for the Society. We do not foresee increasing dues again in the near future.

Table 1. Proposed new level of dues needed to meet increasing society expenses

Category	2025 Dues	Proposed 2026 Dues	Increase	Proposed 2026 Category	Category Note
Student	\$40	\$40	\$0	Student	Retain
<50K	\$65	\$95	\$30	<50K	Retain
50-75K	\$90	\$135	\$45	50-75K	Retain
75-100K	\$110	\$175	\$65	75-100K	Retain
>100K	\$130	\$230	\$100	>100K	Retain
>\$150K	\$130	\$250	\$120	>\$150K	NEW
Emeritus	\$0	\$45	\$45	Emeritus	Retain
Developing Country Student	\$10	\$10	\$0	Developing Country Student	Retain
Developing Country Member	\$10		\$0	Developing Country Member	Retain