



YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH WATER

Finding Connection Through Accountability

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Every living thing on Earth has an invaluable relationship with water. Water creates habitats, fuels ecosystems, and maintains the vast array of life on this planet. It's not just what we drink, water is part of the air we breathe and the food we eat. It regulates the Earth's temperature and sustains economies and social communities, connecting us all through one vast, interdependent system.

With no exception, each person is a part of an ecosystem that depends upon healthy water, yet the health of the environment and the vitality of water is so often an afterthought—collateral damage for those looking to advance economic and industrial prosperity. When these governing bodies fail to prioritize water, they fail to prioritize life as we know it. It's up to the individual then, to take accountability for the water that sustains us.

We are all continuously effecting change to the environment, be it positive or negative. It's within the power of each person to take accountability for the Earth's wellbeing, and when we do so, we have the opportunity to make positive change.

A Message from Robert Turner,

Chair of Georgian Bay Forever



Good day from Craigeleith in the Town of the Blue Mountains. I am writing today as the new board chair of this amazing organization. At our board meeting in October, GBF's leadership took us through our newly minted 2026-2029 Strategic Plan, containing four Key Strategic Priorities (KSPs) and the SMART goals that operationalize them. While the KSPs are new, based on a thorough analysis of the current environment, the one thing that remains constant is that, with your support, we have the organizational strength to tackle them.

Our mission remains unchanged—to protect, enhance, and restore the aquatic ecosystem of Georgian Bay through a combination of scientific research, public education, and community action—and as you will learn from this newsletter, choices matter, and sharing what you learn can lead to small changes that add up across many households. Georgian Bay makes up over 25% of Lake Huron, is about 80% of the size of Lake Ontario, and forms an integral part of our Great Lakes that holds roughly 20% of our world's fresh water. I invite you to re-establish your own connection to, and the responsibility for, our water, with an understanding that it is not only for you, but for the generations to come.

GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER Research, Education, Action

Georgian Bay Forever is a community response to the growing need for major research and education to sustain the Georgian Bay aquatic ecosystem and the quality of life its communities and visitors enjoy.

We help monitor Georgian Bay's well-being, throughout the seasons, year after year.

We fund the research needed to protect the environmental health of Georgian Bay and the surrounding bodies of water. Using our research findings, we inform and educate the general public and governments about threats to environmental health, and propose possible solutions.

Through workshops, seminars, and online communication, we are educating the Georgian Bay community. By teaming up with reputable institutions, we enhance the credibility of our research and strengthen our ability to protect what's at stake.

Georgian Bay Forever is a registered Canadian charity (#89531 1066 RR0001). We work with the Great Lakes Basin Conservancy in the United States, as well as other stakeholder groups all around the Great Lakes.

Georgian Bay Forever is steered by our esteemed board of directors, a group of dedicated individuals who are committed to ensuring the functionality and purpose of our organization. They bring their experience and expertise to all aspects of operation, with the common goal of protecting and conserving Georgian Bay.



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Canadian citizens may send their donations to the address above.

U.S. citizens wishing to make a donation to support our work can
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This newsletter is just a snapshot of our work. For the most up-to-date information on our projects, longer versions of newsletter articles, and breaking news about Georgian Bay, please become a regular visitor to our Facebook page and website:

GBF.ORG

Design and Editing by Laura Thippahawong

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Georgian Bay Forever's *Water Usage Guide*

By Laura Thipphawong



Keeping your drinking water safe and healthy is of the utmost importance. It's something that many people in Canada don't often think about, but for those living or travelling to specific areas in Georgian Bay, considering the state of your drinking water is essential. It could mean life or death, yet the responsibilities and best practices of maintaining safe drinking water are often a mystery.

Please share the Georgian Bay Forever Water Usage Guide with anyone interested.

www.georgianbayforever.org/water-usage-guide

Thank you to the donors who made this work possible.



The team at Georgian Bay Forever is intent on demystifying the facts about maintaining safe drinking water. When we were recently called upon to help educate the public after an unexpected contamination, we were eager to step in. The incident was brought to our attention in summer, 2025—a contractor was hired to clear a section of inland forest in the Minnow Bay area near Honey Harbour, and subsequently destroyed a beaver dam.

This action caused widespread contamination of the interconnected waterways, with much of the area's rivers and lakes inundated by highly contaminated, murky water and sludge. After receiving word of the contamination, Georgian Bay Forever deployed staff to the area to survey the extent of turbidity from the sediment plume. We took secchi depth readings at several sites inside the affected bay and surrounding waters for reference. We also collected water samples and conducted testing for *E. coli* and total coliforms, and reported the findings to the community. Working with the township, the mayor, and local community members, we then educated the community about the implications of these findings and informed them of best practices for water usage.

This incident also inspired us to take further, widespread action in our public education efforts, and so the Georgian Bay Forever Water Usage Guide was created. Now available for print and digital download on our website (www.georgianbayforever.org/water-usage-guide), the guide serves as a handy reference for using lake water for drinking, cooking, irrigation, cleaning, and recreational purposes. The guide succinctly breaks down the potential health risks of using lake water in various circumstances, explains how to test for health hazards in the water, and outlines best practices for safe water use.

We want people to love and enjoy the land and water of Georgian Bay, and that means staying safe and healthy while doing so. The expectation of swift governmental action and attention regarding water safety is, unfortunately, not always realistic. The safety and usability of water are not always a given, and understanding water quality is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. We know, however, that through proper education, everyone can develop a better understanding of water and how to use it effectively.



On Fisheries in a Changing Ecosystem

By Rachael Keighan, PhD Candidate, University of Guelph

It's undeniable that fish are embedded in the lives and livelihoods of Georgian Bay communities. For millennia, fish and fishing practices have been part of the culture and identity of the Anishinaabe peoples, who maintain stewardship over these waters. Species like lake whitefish, lake trout, sucker, and walleye have sustained communities here for generations. Today, fishing is a way of life for indigenous peoples and settlers alike, allowing us to connect with the environment and learn life skills such as patience, problem-solving, self-sufficiency, and, most importantly, a deep respect for aquatic life and the natural world.

Beyond its cultural significance, fishing is central to the economic prosperity of the Great Lakes region. Both commercial and charter fisheries (particularly when locally operated) provide substantial economic support to local communities. Recreational anglers, for instance, come to Georgian Bay from across the world to experience its natural beauty and fishing opportunities, thereby boosting the seasonal economies of numerous industries (e.g., guiding, hospitality, shopping, and general tourism).

Yet Lake Huron is currently experiencing a period of unprecedented environmental change, raising concerns for both conservation and community prosperity. Since the late 1990s, Lake Huron has seen declines in once-robust salmonine (salmon and trout), and coregonine (lake whitefish and cisco) fisheries ¹, and, while salmonine stocks are generally thought to be improving, particular concern remains for the state of whitefish populations.

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There are, in my opinion, two keys to ensuring the healthy future of our lakes. The first is motivation—reminding ourselves that we are all affected by fisheries declines, either directly or indirectly. The second is consistent action—remembering that no act of conservation is too small.

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Many of these notable fisheries' declines are best explained by disturbances to the overall structure and function of the Lake Huron food web. Take, for instance, the widespread invasion of dreissenid mussels (zebra and quagga). These highly efficient filter feeders have been credited with the "desertification" of Great Lakes pelagic (offshore) zone ² by redirecting energy away from zooplankton that support lake whitefish, ciscoes, and prey fish that, in turn, support larger predators.

Yet some species are adapting their diets to suit these novel conditions. Some pelagic species, like lake whitefish, appear to be relying more heavily on nearshore resources ³. Others, like the cisco of Lake Michigan, appear to be feeding less on zooplankton and more on smaller fish like alewife ⁴. Changes like these in diet and behaviour are part of a species' adaptive capacity, or their ability to respond to novel conditions, and this is thought to be a central aspect of food web resilience.

One of the most powerful tools we have for maintaining adaptive capacity and food web resilience is by preserving the existing complexity of our ecosystems ⁵, and we can do so starting locally. In light of widespread and daunting challenges like climate change and species invasions, it's easy to overlook the myriad other ways humans are altering local conditions and, in turn, local food webs (e.g., urban and agricultural runoff, thermal pollution, shoreline and riparian development, wastewater discharge). The consequences of localized change are often poorly understood, but en masse, they are no less important. Importantly, they are far more manageable at the individual or community levels.

There are, in my opinion, two keys to ensuring the healthy future of our lakes. The first is motivation—reminding ourselves that we are all affected by fisheries' declines, either directly or indirectly. The second is consistent action—remembering that no act of conservation is too small. It's important that we take an active role in ecosystem conservation and restoration (e.g., by volunteering for habitat restoration projects with organizations like Georgian Bay Forever, participating in citizen science initiatives, or advocating with your local representatives for greater environmental protection); however, even small actions (e.g., reducing plastic use, limiting road salt use, cycling or taking public transit rather than driving, using microplastic filters, or shopping locally rather than importing) can have substantial impacts when done collectively. By taking responsibility for the environment, our communities can build the momentum needed to effect meaningful change.



1. State of The Lake: Lake Huron. Great Lakes Fishery Commission <https://www.glfc.org/state-of-the-lake.php?lake=3> (2025).
2. Dove, A. Long-term trends in major ions and nutrients in Lake Ontario. *Aquatic Ecosystem Health & Management* 12, 281–295 (2009).
3. Fera, S. A., Rennie, M. D. & Dunlop, E. S. Broad shifts in the resource use of a commercially harvested fish following the invasion of dreissenid mussels. *Ecology* 98, 1681–1692 (2017).
4. Turschak, B. A. et al. Stable C and N isotope analyses redefine cisco as pelagic piscivores in Lake Michigan. *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 51, 102504 (2025).
5. Moore, J. W. & Schindler, D. E. Getting ahead of climate change for ecological adaptation and resilience. *Science* 376, 1421–1426 (2022).



Science to Stewardship: Restoring Our Responsibility to Water

By David Sweetnam



One small change in the water can make an entire community sit up and listen.

Consider Flint, Michigan. In April 2014, a change in the city's water source produced a metallic smell, discoloured tap water, and strange tastes. Families reported skin and hair problems, and independent tests later showed dangerously high lead levels in children's blood. What began as a cost-saving decision became a public-health crisis and revealed how quickly safeguards can fail.

That same decade, communities around Lake Erie experienced toxic algae blooms that closed municipal intakes. On August 2, 2014, nearly half a million people in Cleveland woke to a drinking-water advisory after microcystin, a toxin from blue-green algae, was detected in the supply. Residents scrambled for bottled water, hospitals adjusted services, and trust in local water safety was shaken.

Closer to home, a recent incident made the threat tangible for our community. A contractor breached a beaver dam while clearing a flooded roadway, releasing pond sediments into the adjacent bay. Residents who draw drinking water directly from the lake found intake sediment filters clogging every few days and feared bacterial contamination ahead of a busy holiday weekend. They worried

about their grandchildren, children swimming, and the safety of their tap water.

We responded immediately in person, but we also developed a practical resource now available to everyone: the GBF Water Usage Guide. *See our article, The Georgian Bay Forever Water Usage Guide, page 3 of this newsletter.

Georgian Bay Forever's commitment to water accountability is built on rigorous science and clear public education. We study, test, and explain what affects our water so people can make informed choices to protect it, and we create programs to address the issues. Shoreline cleanups showed that cigarette butts were a prevalent pollutant, so we launched the Unsmoke receptacle collection program.

And our Critical Catch program has diverted over 70 km of waste fishing line from entering the Bay, and brought live fish into classrooms so students can learn, by interacting with local wildlife, why it is important to protect the water.

Georgian Bay is an extraordinary part of the Great Lakes, which together hold roughly 20 percent of the world's surface fresh water. That abundance can make the Bay feel permanent, but it also hides how rare and fragile these waters are. When something goes wrong elsewhere in the basin, it reminds us why vigilance matters here.

Accountability to water means more than reacting to crises. It means acting responsibly before problems escalate, using science to measure and explain risk, communicating clearly with neighbours and decision makers, and empowering people with simple practices that protect the whole community.

GBF's approach to accountability for our water is through scientific research and the integration of knowledge from all sources and traditions. Our actions are grounded in



Science is not just a tool—it's a promise: to understand, to protect, and to be accountable. When careful monitoring is paired with clear communication and practical guidance, data becomes action. Science becomes stewardship.

relational ethics and reflect responsibility for water—not ownership of it. We see water as a living system that supports communities, wildlife, and future generations. That perspective guides our priorities and programs: monitoring water quality, removing invasive species to protect habitat and native species, supporting shoreline clean-ups and restoration, teaching students about their watershed, and partnering with local communities and First Nations.

Science is not just a tool—it's a promise: to understand, to protect, and to be accountable. When careful monitoring is paired with clear communication and practical guidance, data becomes action. Science becomes stewardship.

Small local changes can also echo far beyond our shores. Our peer-reviewed research in Parry Sound, documenting microfibre reductions using washing machine filters has been widely accessed and cited internationally, showing how local science can influence global practice.

You can help. Whether you're a weekend cottager, a year-round resident, a student, an elected official, or a visitor, your choices matter. Read the Water Usage Guide. Attend a shoreline cleanup. Maintain your septic system. Choose natural shorelines and eliminate fertilizer use. Fix and service intake filters. Ask questions, share what you learn, donate, speak up at municipal meetings, and provide comments to governments about the importance of watershed protection.

Together, let's set the example for excellence in water protection by turning everyday choices into collective Georgian Bay action—because protecting our water begins with a shared responsibility to each other. Small changes across many households add up.

Donor Profile

By Amber Gordon

We asked a few of our new board members what their relationship is to Georgian Bay, and how they understand their role in its conservation. Here's what they had to say...



Jen Brundage

What is your relationship with Georgian Bay and its water?

I have had the pleasure of enjoying Georgian Bay throughout my life, and I now reside on the shore. The Bay is my place to relax, enjoy the awe of the water, and the land and species that reside there. We enjoy kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing, walking our dog and exploring.

What actions have you taken (or will you take) to have an impact on water quality since learning more about the threats (climate change, water temp increasing, microplastics, forever chemicals, etc.)?

Microplastics are everywhere you look on the shorelines. The negative impacts on the food chain of the birds, amphibians, fish and animals, and the overall health of the Bay is a huge concern for us.

Whenever I am on the shore, I stop to pick up anything unnatural that doesn't belong there. One of the most frequent small finds is the micro pieces of blue foam from old docks. I often find swaths washed up in a pile, and use a small rake to collect them. Every time I pick up microplastics and

debris on the beach, I think about the impact, and it makes me feel like I am helping the Bay.

What is the one major threat to water quality that you personally want to help mitigate the effects of on Georgian Bay?

Pollution of aquatic ecosystems from land use activities. Public education and mitigation solutions to educate, and change habits and patterns that have ill effects on the waterways of Georgian Bay, are a lifelong commitment. This includes everything from water management, use of forever chemicals, waste disposal, property maintenance, and updating systems to be more efficient and reduce substances from entering waterways.

Dave Sharpe

What is your relationship with Georgian Bay and its water?

We live on both the western and eastern shores of Georgian Bay. Our farm sits on the southern shore of the Owen Sound, just west of Meaford, a couple of kilometres west of the Ministry of Defence Ballistic Range. Our summer cottage is north of Parry Sound in Pointe au Baril. We quite literally live with the Bay most of the year. We treasure its many moods and bask in its natural embrace. We must be some of the first into the water every Spring, and the last to shiver our way out in the Fall. We're a close family. Along with grandkids, we sail, fish, paddle, kayak, picnic and swim every day the weather allows. We love Georgian Bay

What actions have you taken (or will you take) to have an impact on water quality since learning more



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about the threats (climate change, water temp increasing, microplastics, forever chemicals, etc.)?

Besides being deeply involved with our communities as volunteer leaders dedicated to protecting and preserving this ecosystem, we are trying to make positive changes at home. Replacing all our docking away from styrofoam floatation and disposing of the old docks responsibly, limiting our casual use of higher horsepower 4-stroke boat engines and using smaller more efficient transport whenever possible, and limiting our on-water recreation to the “silent sports” that harness muscle and wind power, are just a few of the ways we are trying to limit our pollutants into the water and combat global climate change

What is the one major threat to water quality that you personally want to help mitigate the effects of on Georgian Bay?

I want to work to stop all human-originated water pollutants from poisoning the water. Not to make it safer for humans, but to make it safe for species that live in, on and around the Bay. “Forever” chemicals, human waste effluent, farming chemicals, marine waste, industrial pollutants, all of it. With good science to prove the deadly impact across the spectrum and coordination between NGOs and local governments across the Great Lakes in both countries, it can and must be done.

Massood Oroomchi

What is your relationship with Georgian Bay and its water?

My connection to Georgian Bay is rooted in both personal values and professional commitment. Like all waterways, Georgian Bay reflects a shared natural heritage and a fundamental human right vital for life. Although I do not reside directly on its shores, I wholeheartedly support the GBF mission to maintain its quality for current and future generations. To me, Georgian Bay is not only an environmental treasure but also a symbol of the responsibility we all bear to protect Canada’s water resources.

What actions have you taken (or will you take) to have an impact on water quality since learning more about the threats (climate change, water temp increasing, microplastics, forever chemicals, etc.)?

As a member of GBF’s Board of Directors and Chair of the Finance, GRC & Nominating Committee, I am committed to enhancing governance, risk management, and compliance practices at both the Board and Management levels. This ensures that GBF’s resources are used effectively, its



objectives are achieved efficiently, and its strategic plan to safeguard Georgian Bay is fully implemented. Beyond governance, I also lead by example—reducing single-use plastics in my daily routine, advocating for responsible packaging, and raising awareness within my professional and personal networks about the urgent need to protect our waters.

What is the one major threat to water quality that you personally want to help mitigate the effects of on Georgian Bay?

I believe microplastics are among the most urgent threats to the Great Lakes and Georgian Bay. I am committed to helping address this issue by supporting GBF’s initiatives to improve consumer packaging and recycling practices, while also applying my governance and finance expertise to advance projects focused on plastic reduction and waste management. At the same time, I take steps in my own life to reduce plastic use and encourage others to do the same, understanding that combating microplastics requires both organizational leadership and personal action.



The Big Problem with Microfibres

By Laura Thippawong

The issue of microfibres in the Great Lakes is significant. A paper published in 2011 in the *Environmental Science & Technology* journal helped introduce the concept of microplastic pollution to the public, illustrating that the ingestion of microplastics carries with it the potential for pollution transfer to living organisms. The paper notes that an important source of microplastics is the sewage created from microfibres, which shed from clothes in the washing machine. These fibres are considered microplastics because they are made from synthetic materials or treated with synthetic chemicals. The paper concluded that as the human population continues to grow, unless there is intervention, the amount of microfibres in the water will grow as well. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reported that 35% of microplastics in the ocean originated from clothing and textiles, while various scientific studies have concluded that microfibres are ubiquitous in the Great Lakes, with a four-year study published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research* noted that every algae sample collected from various parts of the Great Lakes contained the presence of microfibres. The growing issue of microfibres in the Great Lakes and in all of Earth's water is undeniable. Though the exact threats posed by microplastics in water are as of yet inconclusive, it can be reasonably assumed that the effects of consuming plastic particles through the water

and air will have adverse long-term consequences. Rather than wait as the problem continues to grow, we have the opportunity to act as individuals to help remediate the mass dissemination of microplastics in water.

The full picture of the effects of microfibres on human and animal health is not yet conclusive, however, negative health outcomes are probable. Due to the size of microfibres (less than 5 millimeters in length), and their ubiquity in drinking water, there is a chance that toxic materials could cross the blood-brain barrier, according to a paper published in the independent scientific journal *EMBO Reports*. Some skeptics hypothesise that the larger microfibres will likely pass through the digestive tract without affecting the body, and that the size of microfibres that do not exit the digestive tract may be insignificant. This premise is a rational one if we look only at the limited data on a short-term timeline. It stands to reason—knowing that microfibres are found in food, drinking water, and even the air—that the ingestion of chemicals by humans and animals will increase as long as the growing population purchases and washes synthetic materials. By factoring in the long-term accumulation of ingesting these materials, the prognosis becomes much more dire. Reports show that microfibres under 100 nm can enter nearly all organs of the human body, and long-term plastic ingestion or exposure is linked to neurotoxicity, carcinogenicity, reproductive issues, developmental issues, and digestive and metabolic problems, among other maladies.

In 2021, a bill was proposed to prohibit the sale or distribution of washing machines not equipped with a microplastics filter, acknowledging the probability of adverse health effects for both humans and animals as a result of increasing microfibre presence in water. In 2023, that bill was amended to Bill 83, the Environmental Protection Amendment Act (Microfibre Filters for Washing Machines), but is not yet past the first reading stage. Government regulations take time, even and perhaps especially the ones meant to prioritize and protect the environment. For those who wish to aid in a sustainable future and help slow the spread of microfibres in drinking water, the air, and all through the natural environment, waiting for the government to act is inadequate. Georgian Bay Forever has long encouraged Bill 83 and its iterations, along with our Divert and Capture program that offered free washing machine filters to residents in the Georgian Bay area. While that program has come to a close, we continue to advocate for the installation of microfibre filters on all washing machines, new and old. Everyone can contribute to the reduction of microfibres in water, not only by purchasing a washing machine filter, but by changing basic habits. Doing laundry less often, using liquid detergent instead of powder, washing in cold water, and reducing the use of or purchase of synthetic materials are just a few ways you can help the environment.

Eliminating Unencapsulated Dock Foam—Once and For All



By Laura Thipphawong



Personal access to water is one of life's great joys for many coastal cottage-goers and residents of Georgian Bay. If you are a waterfront property owner, whether you want to fish, swim, or boat, chances are you make use of a dock on your stretch of coastline. Unfortunately, the use of unencapsulated foam to keep your dock afloat is a major contributor to microplastic and microparticle pollution in the water. Georgian Bay Forever has been active in the movement to eradicate unencapsulated dock foam from these shores for years, and in 2025 we teamed up with the Georgian Bay Association to continue spreading awareness and educate the public on these hazards.

Unlike encapsulated—or sheathed—dock foam, unencapsulated foam, often found in older docks, breaks apart into small particles over time. Debris and small pieces of pollution are often some of the hardest to recover or collect. When that debris eventually turns into microplastics (particles less than five millimetres in length), they become near-

ly impossible to excavate. These pieces of pollution, from small to microscopic, harm wildlife and the human population alike, transforming ecosystems and leaching chemicals into the water we all share. There have been advancements in the effort to amend this issue, such as Bill 228, which came into effect in 2023, prohibiting the creation, sale, or purchase of unencapsulated dock foam in Ontario. The bill, however, doesn't apply to docks already in use.

Along with the Georgian Bay Association, we want to continue spreading the word about this ongoing source of pollution, and help people to understand their part in Georgian Bay's stewardship. Now is the time to be part of the solution. An investment in upgrading or replacing your unencapsulated dock foam is an investment in the health of Georgian Bay and the entirety of the ecosystem at large. Options such as modular cubes (encapsulated foam), steel pontoon docks, pontoon bases, and barrel docks pose far less damage to the environment than the old unencapsulated dock foam bases.

We share this beautiful and rare gem of a bay, not just with each other, but with the wildlife who call it home. These water systems are vast and interconnected—pollution in the water doesn't just affect your home, or even just your neighbor's homes, it affects the water, land, and air at large. We urge everyone to take the time and effort to invest in the future of water. An investment in the health and conservation of water is an investment in life.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS:
www.georgianbayforever.org/dock-foam

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"The Baykeeper" indicates that Georgian Bay Forever is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, a global movement of on-the-water advocates who patrol and protect over 100,000 miles of rivers, streams and coastlines in North And South America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa.

For more information go to waterkeeper.org



THESE LOCAL BUSINESSES STEPPED UP TO HELP PROTECT GEORGIAN BAY



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