

# THE PROFESSIONAL

Professional Employees Association | Volume 46 Issue 2

BC's Union for Professionals

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As our new normal continues to shift daily because of COVID-19, I wanted to send a message of solidarity to our members. Whatever situation you are in, know that we are in this together.

The PEA is made up of a wide range of professionals. Our Health Science Professional members are working in our communities, continuing to enter homes to support the public during this pandemic. Many members have been redeployed in support of the COVID-19 crisis. To all of our members who are working at the front-lines and leaving their families and the sanctuary of their homes to keep essential services running, you are in our hearts. The work you are doing is critical and our PEA executive and staff team are so grateful for your commitment. Thank you.

I'd also like to acknowledge the thousands of front-line workers across this province that are supporting British Columbians. We owe them a great debt.

We continue to focus on coordinating with employers on their response to COVID-19 and fighting to protect the immediate safety of our members. We know that this is a stressful time and many members are fighting for job security, paid leaves, and child care support provisions. Our team is meeting continually to triage member concerns and we are in regular contact with employers to ensure a coordinated response that protects PEA members. If you need support, know that we are here for you.

No one knows how long this will continue. Some of our PEA members will be laid off. In March, nearly 40 PEA members working in the kitchen, residence, and support staff areas at St. Margaret's School lost their jobs. These temporary lay-offs are a direct result of the BC Government suspending in-classroom learning. We are fighting for rights to support these members as they face professional and financial uncertainty.

Many other members are worried about their futures. The threat is significant. Some are uncertain of how they will care for their children in these extraordinary circumstances. We are waiting for direction from the government about how we will face this challenge so that members are not forced to take vacation time or unpaid leave in order to fulfill child care needs.

Whatever challenge you are facing, please know that we are here for you during the duration of COVID-19 and beyond. It will be a trying time, and we'll get through it together. Please connect with your Local Rep, Chapter Executive, or Labour Relations Officer for support.

I hope that you and your loved ones remain safe and healthy as this global challenge continues to unfold. Let's support each other by connecting virtually, practicing self-care for our mental health, and following the guidelines of our Provincial Health Officer.

Stay apart, stay connected, and stay safe.



**MEMBERS SUPPORTING PINK SHIRT DAY DURING LOCAL REP TRAINING:** Dorothea Harris (UVic), Ash Senini (UVic), Melissa Moroz (PEA), Carolyn Krawchuk (GLP), Sabiha Sultana (GLP), Annie Maki (SMS), Dawn McConnell (LSS), Aimee Cho (HESU), Zaheen Rhemtulla (HSP), Chrissy Polajzar (HESU), Ruby Dorais (HESU), Cody Tolmie (UVic), Sam Montgomery (PEA), Ryan Flagg (UVic), Jeremy Orrego (LSS), and Tammy Bouchard (PEA).



**ABOVE:** Sabiha Sultana (GLP)

**LEFT:** Ash Senini (UVic) and Annie Maki (SMS)

**ON THE COVER:** GLP members Shawna LaRade, Hanna McIntyre, and Todd Larsen



**ABOVE:** Melissa Moroz (PEA), Ryan Flagg (UVic), Zaheen Rhemtulla (HSP), and Jeremy Orrego (LSS)

## THE PROFESSIONAL


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A person with long red hair, wearing a light green shirt and dark jeans, is walking away from the camera through a dry, grassy field. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky.

# HELPING PREVENT WILDFIRES THROUGH TARGETED CATTLE GRAZING

## NEW TECHNOLOGY HELPS RANGE AGROLOGISTS CONTROL HIGH RISK AREAS

**WORDS** JESSICA WOOLLARD AND JORDANA WHETTER

**PHOTOS** LUCY HAMILTON

The risk of wildfires in BC's wildlands and urban areas continues to be a concern. The catastrophic fires we have seen in recent years can have significant negative social, economic and environmental impacts. Thankfully, many of the PEA's government licensed professionals are working throughout the province to prevent and mitigate the impact of wildfires.

The Rocky Mountain Resource District Range Program, led by Range Officer and PEA President Shawna LaRade, P.Ag, is part of a trial project aimed at mitigating wildfire hazards through the use of targeted livestock grazing strategies. Targeted grazing involves the use of cattle to help keep easily ignitable grasslands in check. The program is one of several fuel mitigation projects surrounding the city of Cranbrook.

As part of the project, PEA agrologists are working with local ranchers, the BC Cattlemen's Association, Thompson Rivers University and other partners to test the viability of "virtual fence technology" for managing cattle. The project involves the use of solar-powered, geo-referenced collars on cattle to track and manage their location and regulate their movements using audible signals. The goal is to reduce the fire hazard by keeping the cattle grazing within targeted areas where they can consume the grass and flowering plants that act as fine fuel.

Virtual fencing systems could play an important role in helping to meet grazing management goals, says LaRade, project lead for the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD).

"Targeted cattle grazing isn't the only solution to wildfire risk," she notes. "But it can be useful to complement the work of our foresters in wildfire-risk-reduction planning."

The project marks the first time in Canada that GPS collars and virtual fencing technology will be used together. According to the BC Ministry of Agriculture, similar programs in southern Europe and parts of the United States have been successful. LaRade is working with fellow range agrologists and PEA members, Todd Larsen and Hanna McIntyre, to

"Many people think our work is just about managing live-stock foraging," says McIntyre. "But at a higher level we are managing grasslands, ecosystem health and the quality of wildlife habitat through science-based monitoring and professional recommendations."

"The range program requires a consistent biophysical health assessment to understand how our ecosystem functions," adds Larsen. "We're continually identifying potential mitigation strategies."



implement the program and report back on the its success.

The work is typical of the projects LaRade's team undertakes to manage crown lands. As range agrologists, they work closely with a variety of agriculture producers, Indigenous communities, industries and stakeholders to manage the vast landscapes in the Rocky Mountain Trench, at the headwaters of the Columbia River.

For example, McIntyre and Larsen are developing strategies to protect and restore sensitive areas such as the riparian zones around bodies of water, which can receive significant use by grazing cattle and wild ungulates. They conduct range-forage assessments to determine levels of available forage and safe-use allocations for livestock. And they work to understand disturbance regimes and how they impact the health and ecology of diverse ecosystems.

## Meet PEA President Shawna LaRade

Though many days are spent thinking about cattle behaviours, LaRade says she was “never really a cow person,” though many range agrologists have that background.

“I recognize that the economics of the industry are important. We just need to find that balance and equilibrium to ensure that our beautiful wild landscapes remain that way,” she says. “Over the past 12 years of my work I have learned so much from the ranchers, Indigenous communities, my peers and mentors. I am so thankful to be part of this community.”



Born and raised in Ontario, LaRade saw the mountains for the first time at age 15, when she worked as a junior forest ranger in Alberta. She vowed she would return.

After completing a diploma in ecosystem management in 1999 at Sir Sandford Fleming College in Ontario, she enrolled at the University College of the Cariboo, now Thompson Rivers University, where she earned a Bachelor of Natural Resource Science degree. Wanting to study further, she began a Master of Science degree at the University of Alberta, specializing in range and wildlife resources. She finished the program in 2010 while working full time for government.

In addition to her work as an agrologist, LaRade recently became president of the PEA, following a few years as a local representative and member of the GLP chapter executive. As parents to three young daughters, Shawna and her husband, Tim, are used to being busy. Growing up, she was the sixth in a family of 12 children—six boys and six girls.

Since joining the PEA in 2008, LaRade has been an advocate for GLP members taking paternity leave and has helped achieve success in bargaining. When LaRade started with government, junior staff could not count their time on paternity leave toward their step increments for salary increases. With the help of LaRade’s advocacy, the PEA negotiated language stating that employees on paternity leave are entitled to their step increments.

It’s clear that LaRade is passionate about every facet of the work she does. From monitoring land use and driving innovative new ministry programs, to advocating for better benefits for PEA members, she is a positive, fun and respected leader who wants the best for all of her natural environments.

# RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE

## ADAPTING TO CHANGE DURING COVID-19

**WORDS** JORDANA WHETTER

**PHOTOS** AARON LUTSCH

In the midst of COVID-19 and the changes we have all made to flatten the curve, many PEA members are not only doing their jobs differently but actually transforming their professional services and contributing behind the scenes to significant projects.

Librarians with the Okanagan Regional Library (ORL) are continuing to engage with their local communities by moving some of their regular programming online, to the delight of small children who are out of school and daycare during COVID-19. Ashley Machum Hutton, ORL's Head of Youth Services, and her colleagues have been offering virtual storytime for children of all ages on ORL's YouTube channel and through Zoom.

"The enthusiasm and gratitude from families has been amazing," says Hutton. "Young children are excited and reassured to see someone familiar. We hope to bring fun and normalcy to this very strange time for families."

ORL members are working together to offer a range of online services. The Tech Crew at the library have shifted their Coding Club online and have created awesome STEAM videos for families at home on a range of topics like making a bug house, two-ingredient playdough, paper catapults and more. Librarians and staff have also collaborated to create a curated list of online homeschooling resources for families.



**ABOVE:** Librarian and PEA member Ashley Machum Hutton during Rhyme Time (Photo credit: ORL's YouTube channel)



**ABOVE:** PEA executive member and teacher Bev Waterfield on St. Margaret's School campus

Of course, e-book checkouts and the digital newsstand continue to be popular but librarians have also seen increases in interest for online adult book clubs, poetry circles, ukulele instruction, and ESL conversational groups. They also offer book clubs by phone for patrons with print disability. Monday to Saturday they have virtual chat hours to help people gain access to all of the virtual resources.

"Going forward, many of these online offerings will continue because it is another way for the library to stay connected with the public," says Hutton. "The library is not just a physical building for gathering. Our online programs and services bring the community together. We are meeting our communities where we are needed, at home."

Members at St. Margaret's School (SMS) are committed to making remote learning a positive experience for international and local students. They are continually connecting with parents and checking in with students each day.

"The school is using Seesaw and Google classroom to share lessons," says teacher and PEA executive member, Bev Waterfield. "These are challenging times for everyone and our members are happy that families are safe and that learning continues."

At UVic, moving courses online has been a big task. Instructors are grappling with key decisions about whether the class should be real-time or more flexibly delivered, how to adapt assessments and activities, what technology to use and when, how to create accessible online content, and what facilitation strategies to use.

To get ready for the summer term, the Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation (LTSI) has launched its new Teach Anywhere site, which provides instructors with access to resources that support these decisions. They've also been working hard to bring UVic's online environments up to the task by collaborating with University Systems to add new tools to UVic's Learning Technology Ecosystem.



"I'm inspired by all the hard work our staff and the instructors are putting towards the move to an online summer term," says PEA member Mariel Miller, Director of Technology Integrated Learning at UVic and an Adjunct Assistant Professor with the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies.

"For our group, this has involved incredible change. From finding new ways to provide pedagogical support to faculty, to working closely with University Systems to add Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Kaltura and Crowdmark to our suite of learning technology. We've handled all of the logistics this entails while also working remotely."

"Although this type of change is never easy, a big positive has been the new ways of working together and new relationships (both within and across our units) that have come about as we all try to get through this challenge and ultimately ensure the UVic community can thrive."

Miller hopes this experience will open new doors for using technology in ways that support high-quality learning and teaching once UVic is able to return to in-person classes.

On another part of the UVic campus, members who work in research computing services have been working as part of an international collaborative effort with [folding@home](mailto:folding@home) to simulate the behaviour of viral protein structures. The goal is to help model possible drug-accessible treatment sites for COVID-19.

"Our team is helping to accelerate the work of protein-folding analysis," says Jeff Albert, a Senior Unix Systems Administrator at UVic. "Scientists need to understand how these viral proteins work so they can design potential treatments to stop them."

"It's a wonderful feeling to be able to contribute to work that is being done to understand and conquer COVID-19. Our team is very proud to be part of UVic's ambitious research computing initiative and to partner with national agencies like Compute Canada and Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada."

**We acknowledge the work our members are doing on the front-lines during COVID-19 and will be profiling these essential service roles in a future edition. If you'd like to share your story please contact Jordana Whetter ([jwhetter@pea.org](mailto:jwhetter@pea.org)).**

# DEFENDING BC FAMILIES

## FAMILY MAINTENANCE LAWYERS IN ONGOING MEDIATION

**WORDS** SCOTT MCCANNELL

The BC government is ignoring lawyers fighting for the province's most vulnerable children and their single parents.

Family Maintenance Agency (FMA) staff lawyers make sure the most at-risk children and families in BC get paid the child support money they're owed. They take on the most challenging child support cases in the province, the ones where a parent has the financial capacity to provide for their family but chooses not to.

But although these 12 FMA lawyers are fighting for justice for these families, they make only a fraction of what other public sector lawyers are paid. Their wages are 20 per cent lower than provincial legal aid lawyers and 50 per cent of what their counterparts in Crown Counsel and the Legal Services Branch earn. The government can't expect to attract and retain qualified lawyers to provide these services with such large wage disparities.

The work these lawyers do is critical. Parents can face a complex legal system, ex-spouses who are unwilling to shoulder their responsibilities, and the high cost of legal representation. The Family Maintenance Agency ensures every BC family has equal access to family justice, regardless of their ability to pay. And the need is significant—the FMA annual report for 2018—2019 states that only one in three eligible BC families has been paid in full for the child support they're owed.

For vulnerable children and parents being deprived of child support payments, FMA lawyers can be the difference between having the necessities of life—like food, clothing and a bed—and having to go without. Since 1988, their work has ensured \$4.1 billion in support payments for 140,000 vulnerable children and families who otherwise would have been denied the support payments they deserve.

As anyone who's been involved in family court matters knows, the challenge is extraordinary. Often these lawyers are fighting for family support payments from people who have chosen to work in the underground economy in order to avoid their child support obligations. Personal safety is also an issue. As the face of FMA in court proceedings, these lawyers often work with self-represented litigants who are sometimes dealing with difficult personal circumstances. Yet FMA lawyers continue to advocate and fight for BC families.





Clearly, vulnerable children and families who are owed child support payments deserve justice. That requires excellent lawyers with the tools and expertise to defend the legal interests of people who otherwise would be all on their own.

The contract for FMA lawyers expired in March of 2019 and talks with the employer were pushed off until November 2019, when FMA transitioned from being a contracted service provider to a newly established Crown Agency overseen by the BC government.

But rather than recognizing that FMA lawyers have been historically underpaid, the government swept them under the Public Sector Employer's Council (PSEC) mandate. This rigid, one-size-fits-all, self-imposing formula does not address the wage inequities FMA lawyers are facing or recognize the unique situation they are in, having moved from the private sector to the public sector. What's more, it puts single parents and children at even more risk by pushing away the high-quality lawyers we need in the courts fighting for family justice.

Now that the wage disparity has grown so wide, the government is sending the message to prospective FMA lawyers that they won't be fairly valued. Why would a young lawyer choose to advocate for family justice and serve those in need when they could enter private practice, Crown Counsel, or the Legal Services Branch and earn a much higher wage?

For these reasons, FMA lawyers have voted 100 per cent in favour of strike action and will continue to hope that ongoing mediation will lead to a contract that justly reflects the critical work they do for BC families.

We believe the BC government has an opportunity here. They can take a stand for those children who are being cheated out of payments by supporting the FMA lawyers who are fighting on their behalf. They can follow through on their promise to help families with affordability issues by ensuring BC families get the financial support they deserve.

The FMA lawyers are doing their part. It's time the BC government did too.



# MAKING CONNECTIONS

## PEA MEMBERS ATTEND CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS'S WINTER SCHOOL

**WORDS** JORDANA WHETTER

**PHOTOS** CONNER MCCONKEY & SONAM DEMA

If there is one theme that gets mentioned more than any other by PEA members who attend the Canadian Labour Congress's Winter School, it is community connections. As the largest union education school in Canada, it's obvious that Winter School, held every January and February at Harrison Hot Springs, is the ideal setting for union members looking to build new connections while learning about the labour movement.

This year, seven PEA members attended Winter School and took courses on topics such as women in leadership, collective bargaining, building healthy workplaces, paths to reconciliation, unions in the community, and facing management effectively. For all of our members, it was an immersive week spent learning, building relationships and having fun with members from other unions.

Charlene Smith, an annual giving officer at the University of Victoria who specializes in appeals and special projects, described her experience as inclusive and welcoming.





**ABOVE:** Harrison Hot Springs (photo credit Conner McConkey)

“As this was my first time working as a member of a union, I thought the chance to learn about unions and network with other union advocates would be valuable, and it was,” Smith said. “It was particularly valuable learning about how my work in fundraising for charitable causes, such as the work we are doing at UVic to support students, can be impacted, influenced and supported by my union and the community.”

Melanie Mamoser, a senior contaminated sites officer with the Government Licensed Professionals (GLP) chapter, shared that she enjoyed the supportive community that she felt at Winter School.

“I made new connections with amazing women across different fields in the labour movement that I can draw on for support,” Mamoser said. “I think it’s great that the PEA sends members at random. It really helped me get a better understanding of

the importance of our union and the hard work being done on our behalf.”

One of the great takeaways that members often experience is the ability to share their learning with their work peers, something Sonam Dema, an international advisor at UVic, plans to do.

“I personally learned a lot about workplace bullying and harassment and what it may look like,” she said. “We were given some great resources and tools to recognize and address workplace mental and psychological stress, and I plan on doing a presentation with my team at our next meeting.”

Conner McConkey, a senior systems analyst also at UVic, shared similar feedback on the course he took on collective bargaining. Understanding how to create bargaining proposals and the language used in collective agreements has inspired him to get involved in future bargaining.



**ABOVE:** HESU and PEA executive members Cherene Palmer and Jackie Paquette (photo credit Sonam Dema)

"My week was a deep dive into the process of bargaining a collective agreement," McConkey said. "Our course instructors took us through the entire collective bargaining process, from determining the needs of the members to legislation around bargaining and strikes and negotiating an agreement."

Not only do members bring back knowledge that they can apply to their work and share with their teams, but the learning also expands their personal outlook. Many members expressed how much they enjoyed meeting people from other unions and building community and connections that will last beyond Winter School.

James Plett, a senior contaminated sites officer with the GLP, noted that he was impressed by the diversity of professions and people who have contributed to the labour movement. He left with a better appreciation for the dynamic relationship that exists between management and the union.

"The mutual agreement between these two parties is essential to the workplace," Plett stated, adding that he also learned communication strategies and critical thinking skills that "not only can help in my work life but also in my personal life."

Many thanks to all of our members who took the time to share their experience, especially those who have not previously participated in PEA activities.

Sponsoring members to attend Winter School is something the PEA is happy to support. Members have the opportunity to participate in Winter School as a result of our affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED), which represents over 500,000 members from unions across BC.

The 2019 survey was conducted using a web-based survey tool. The survey was sent to all members and participation was voluntary.

Twenty-five per cent of members took part in the survey.

The survey was open from November 6–22, 2019.



## 2019 PEA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

# 25%

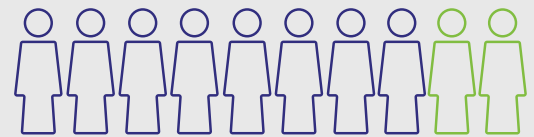
PERCENTAGE OF MEMBERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY



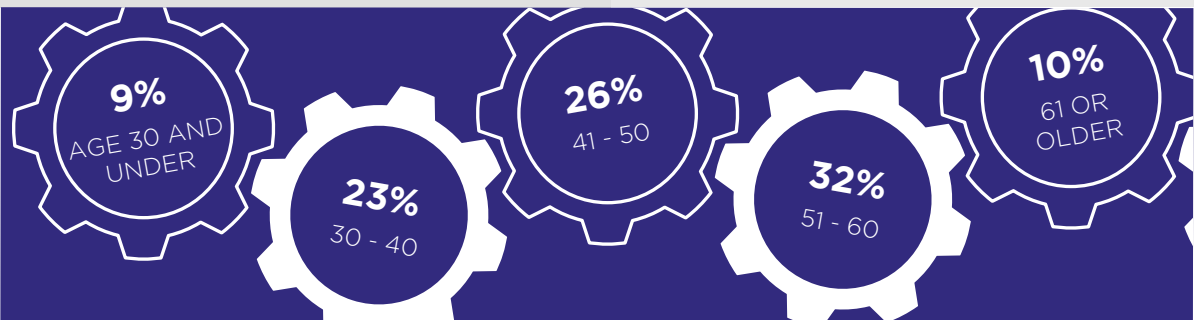
78% OF MEMBERS ARE SOMEWHAT OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

# 86%

OF RESPONDENTS ARE SOMEWHAT OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THE PEA



MORE THAN 8 OUT OF EVERY 10 MEMBERS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE PEA'S APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

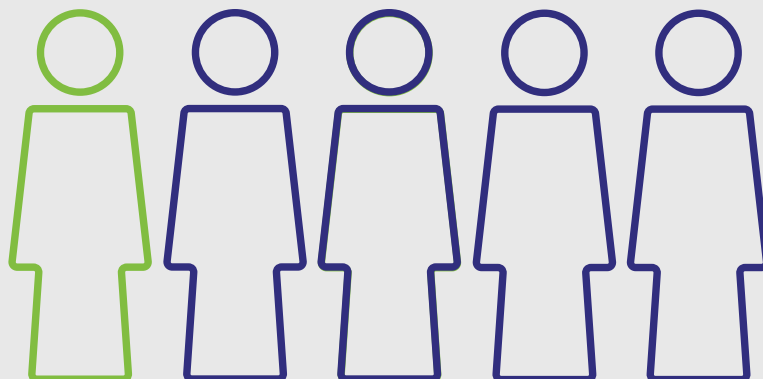


# 92%

OF RESPONDENTS THINK THE PEA DOES A GOOD JOB COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS

# 86%

OF RESPONDENTS THINK PEA COMMUNICATIONS ARE RELEVANT TO THEM AND THEIR CHAPTER



FOUR OUT OF FIVE MEMBERS WHO RESPONDED ARE SOMEWHAT OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE UNION

## PEA UPDATES

### **CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS CONVENTION: POSTPONED**

The PEA was planning to send five delegates to the 29th Constitutional Convention of the Canadian Labour Congress in Vancouver but it has been postponed.

### **EDUCATION CONFERENCE: CANCELLED**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have cancelled the conference for this year. Many thanks to all of our members who expressed interest in attending the biennial Education Conference.

### **EXECUTIVE CHANGES**

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Alyssa Beaven as the new HSP representative on the PEA's executive.

### **BC FEDERATION OF LABOUR RANKING OFFICERS MEETING**

PEA President Shawna LaRade and PEA Executive Director Scott McCannell attended the BCFED Ranking Officers meeting in Harrison Hot Springs this past February. It was a positive experience with great opportunities to network with other unions and meet with both federal and provincial government politicians.

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

We wish Carl Withler, PEA member and past GLP chair, all the best with his retirement from the Ministry of Agriculture this past March. Carl has given so much to the PEA and to his work as a treefruit and grapes industry specialist in Kelowna. The lovely local apples he always shares and his positive outlook will be greatly missed.

Linda Youmans, the youth collections/system librarian for the Okanagan Regional Library System, retired in January after 28 years of service. Linda has held various positions in Kelowna and is a great advocate of resources and services for those with diverse abilities. She was the recipient of the Community Leader of the Year Award in 2019.

If you would like to acknowledge a retiring PEA member, please email [jwhetter@pea.org](mailto:jwhetter@pea.org)

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# SCHOLARSHIP AND BURSARY APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN

Scholarships are available to PEA members and their families. Bursaries are available only to PEA members.

**Deadline for applying: June 30, 2020**

[pea.org/scholarships](http://pea.org/scholarships)

**P|E|A**

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