

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF

### WHITE LAKE PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Secretary Dwight Landreneau opened the White Lake Property Advisory Board meeting with welcoming remarks to the new board members, and explained the handout that was prepared regarding the property and what the departmental staff would be presenting at the meeting.

Secretary Landreneau introduced himself to the Board and asked the members to introduce themselves.

#### **Introduction of White Lake Property Advisory Board Members**

Donald Hale recently retired from Entergy Utility with 40 years service and he also worked with the Congress and the Legislature as a governmental affairs manager for 26 years. Mr. Hale's interest is in wildlife and preservation and he also serves as Secretary/Treasurer with the Friends of Cat Island Federal Game Preserve in St. Francisville.

Annie Smith is the Manager of Public Affairs for BP America for the Gulf Coast and Rockies. Ms. Smith has been with BP, formerly Amoco for 25 years in various locations. Ms. Smith stated she has served on several boards for BP, including Nature Conservancy of Canada and a number of other environmental boards as well.

Karl Connor is the Louisiana Governmental Affairs Director for Louisiana for BP America and has served in this position for approximately one year. Previously, Mr. Connor stated he worked as a prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's office and received the Wildlife and Fisheries docket for a while. Mr. Connor stated he would like to see many educational aspects happen on the property.

Dr. Steve Linscombe is the Regional Director of the Southwest Region for the LSU Ag Center, which means he is the administrator of all of the research and extension activities in a ten parish area in a southwestern portion of the state, including Vermilion Parish. Dr. Linscombe stated that he is also the Director of the Rice Research Station in Crowley, which conducts research in various areas as it relates to rice production and he enjoys leading the rice breeding and is still actively involved in variety development. Dr. Linscombe is a native of Gueydan. He has also conducted off-station research on the Pine Lake property, which is located on the agricultural area on the eastern edge of the White Lake property for approximately 17 years.

Richard Hines is a petroleum land man by trade with 20 years experience in oil and gas and environmental matters. Mr. Hines stated that he does have a background in farming and that he grew up on a farm in Bunkie. He has dealt with a lot of wildlife issues as a land man and hopes to bring something to the Board that will help with not only the environmental and land aspects, but also in contracts because he has a strong background with contracts.

Darwin Miller is a native of Monroe and is employed here locally with the District Attorney's office. Mr. Miller stated that he is the past state chairman of Louisiana Ducks Unlimited and is currently assigned to the National Committee that oversees volunteer and membership relations.

Sammy Noel is a native of Vermilion Parish and has been a farmer for 27 years with a degree in agriculture from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, now known as University of Louisiana – Lafayette. Mr. Noel stated that he has a lot to offer in the line of agriculture because a large portion of White Lake is agricultural lands. Mr. Noel said he thinks he can understand the land and water management that is involved in a tract of land and he has been on this property and can see lots of needs and he knows what has been put into it. He lives within 5 miles of the White Lake property.

Nathan Granger is from Erath, which is located in Vermilion Parish. Mr. Granger stated that he is the UL System Board of Supervisors nominee, where he received an undergraduate degree in finance, as well as a MBA. He owns a business for a quality construction production which is an oil and gas service business that does on-shore fabrication and off-shore fabrication. Mr. Granger reported that he is not a hunter or a fisherman and feels like that is why he is on this Board to bring a different perspective. He is looking at the White Lake picture as a whole for the State of Louisiana.

Eddie Young is and has been a resident of Vermilion Parish for 50 years. Mr. Young said he is in construction and is a licensed contractor with the State of Louisiana working on highway, street and bridge construction and civil construction. Mr. Young stated he will be looking out for interests for the residents of Vermilion Parish and to make this project an economic benefit. Mr. Young reported that he is looking at this project from a dollar and cents point of view and if we can make this project succeed with the money we have.

Claude "Buddy" Leach was originally a plumber before attending and graduating law school. He also served as a state legislator for approximately 20 years where he worked closely with DWF in committee. Mr. Leach stated he feels certain we can merge public use of a publicly owned asset and still protect the asset.

Dr. Gay Gomez is an Associate Professor of Geography at McNeese State University. Dr. Gomez stated she is privileged to have become familiar with the White Lake property when she was completing her dissertation in the 1990's. She said the most recent historical research she has completed is on the historic presence of whooping cranes on

the White Lake Property and she is very interested in doing what she can to help with the management decisions for the property.

Dr. Beverly Wade and Ms. Cindy Brown were not present at this meeting.

Secretary Landreneau introduced Commissioner Henry Mouton to the White Lake Property Advisory Board.

Secretary Landreneau introduced Mr. John Campbell, Jr. to the White Lake Property Advisory Board.

Secretary Landreneau had the following department staff introduce themselves to the White Lake Property Advisory Board:

Janice Lansing, Undersecretary  
John Roussel, Assistant Secretary, Office of Fisheries  
Parke Moore, Assistant Secretary, Office of Wildlife  
Brandt Savoie, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Wildlife  
Dave Moreland, Administrator, Wildlife Division  
Phil Bowman, Administrator, Fur and Refuge Division  
Wayne Sweeney, White Lake Property Manager  
Mike Windham, Mineral Management, Fur and Refuge Division  
Bob Love, Assistant Administrator, Fur and Refuge Division  
Greg Linscombe, Fur and Refuge Division  
Noel Kinler, Alligator Program Manager, Fur and Refuge Division  
Jimmy Anthony, Program Manager, Wildlife Division  
Col. Winton Vidrine, Chief of Law Enforcement  
Lt. Col. Keith LaCaze, Law Enforcement Division  
Wynette Kees, Fiscal Officer, Office of Management and Finance  
Joan Goings, Human Resources Director, Office of Management and Finance  
Jeb Linscombe, Biologist, Rockefeller Refuge  
Bo Boehringer, Press Secretary  
Don Puckett, General Counsel  
Lana Guidry, Administrative Assistant/White Lake Property Advisory Board Recording Secretary  
Bennie Fontenot, Administrator, Inland Fisheries

### **Discussion and Adoption of Operating Procedures**

Secretary Landreneau called Don Puckett up to inform the board members of their duties as advisory board members. Mr. Puckett went over the original Deed of Donation from BP America to the State of Louisiana, explaining that BP retained mineral rights to the property; that all existing agricultural and surface leases remain in effect; conservation restrictions were placed in the Deed of Donation, specifically that the property retain its character as marshland; the State is to make reasonable and continual efforts to preserve the agricultural character and rice production, and preserve current agricultural practices

to the extent possible; there is to be no industrial use, surface mining, commercial hunting, refuse and waste disposal, underground tanks, or inappropriate destruction of vegetation that is out character with the current use of the property; likewise, there is to be no temporary shelter, discharge of firearms near facility, hazardous waste disposal or commercial signs placed on the property. The State's failure to enforce the conservation restrictions or provisions of the Donation constitute grounds for transfer of the property to another entity, which would be a private non-profit entity.

Mr. Puckett discussed Act 613 of the 2004 Regular Session which became effective January 1, 2005. He explained that the Act placed administration, control, and management of the property within the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and also created this Advisory Board. He stated that the Board is to meet at least twice annually, and the functions of the Board are to advise the LWFC and LDWF regarding administration, control, and management of the conservation area; proper operation, management and supervision of all activities, consistent with the Conservation Purposes as stated in the Deed of Donation; development and implementation of a conservation management plan which are consistent with the Conservation Purposes; establishment and maintenance of a bio-diversity wetlands center to be named the BP Wetlands Center; insuring the protection of the natural resources; preserving, protecting, and promoting biological diversity; undertaking land and water management projects that enhance or restore natural wetland and upland habitats; and promoting environmental education and research. Mr. Puckett said that department staff will at some point submit to this Board a proposed conservation management plan for their review and study. During this process, board members will review the proposed plan and approve in its current form or make modifications deemed necessary and appropriate and which are consistent with the conservation restrictions placed in the Deed of Donation. Once the Board has adopted a conservation management plan, the plan will then be submitted to the LWFC. The LWFC will review the submission and recommendation and will ultimately adopt a final conservation management plan for the White Lake property. This plan will go through the administrative rulemaking process, legislative oversight, gubernatorial review, etc. Once this process is completed, there will be a final conservation management plan that will be adopted, promulgated as a rule, and will have the force and effect of law. The conservation management plan may authorize the conduct of lottery hunts, which have been conducted in the past by the private board that oversaw the White Lake property. He stated that agricultural leases in effect are ratified subject to existing terms and conditions. He also explained that a White Lake Property Fund was created containing four sources, which are: agricultural lease revenues and mineral revenues from properties owned by the State in and around White Lake, fees that are obtained by the State for the use of the property, monies from the sale of assets produced by the property, and all donations or public contributions which are dedicated to the property. He stated that any monies received from any of those sources are dedicated solely and exclusively to the enhancement, operation, maintenance of the White Lake wetlands conservation area and to no other purpose.

Mr. Puckett discussed the Cooperative Endeavor Transition Agreement executed in December 2004 between White Lake and the State of Louisiana. He stated its intent was

to provide for an efficient and seamless transfer of management from a private board to the State and allow the Advisory Board to assemble and get up to speed on management issues and issues that affect the property. He said the CEA was effective in December 2004 and expires on July 1, 2005. The transition agreement allows White Lake Preservation, Inc., until July 1, 2005, to receive existing funding sources that were in existence at the time of the passage of the Act, again to be used exclusively for the operation and maintenance of the property. After July 1, 2005 this new Advisory Board's recommendations will be made directly to the LWFC. The transition agreement also contains a provision that the parties would continue, to the extent possible, the employment of the current White Lake employees. It also provides for a transfer of the remaining moveable property located on the area, and the transfer of all of the available cash balance with a full accounting.

Mr. Puckett explained that this Board is a public body and is subject to the Open Meetings law and the Public Records law. He stated that any meeting is an open meeting if it is to discuss official business, and that a quorum of this board must be present in order to conduct business, which would be seven (7) members. He said it is necessary anytime there is an official meeting of this Board to give public notice of the meeting. He informed the Board that LDWF's administrative staff will be taking care of this process once a meeting date has been established. He also explained that any document that is produced or presented to this Board becomes a public record and is open for public inspection.

Mr. Puckett informed the Board that one of the two charges in the Act is that they are to elect officers, which are: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. He stated that this election was placed on the agenda for today, but did not have to take place at today's meeting. He said that the second charge in the Act requires the Board to adopt procedures for the conducting of its business. Mr. Puckett explained to the Board that they did not have to adopt formal by-laws and they could consider adopting Robert's Rules of Order by motion. He recommended to the Board that Robert's Rules of Order would probably be best for now, and they could at a later date, if necessary, adopt formal by-laws.

Mr. John Campbell, Jr. appeared before the Board and commented that White Lake Preservation, Inc. is a public foundation that has managed this property since the donation of the property from BP America. He stated the property is in good condition and that the Board will be pleased with it once it is turned over to them. He stated that the transition of employees has not been completed yet, but said it was in the process of being completed, as well as the transfer of equipment, property, and assets that belongs to the Foundation and was used by the Foundation for management purposes. He said that the property did not have any pending litigation. Mr. Campbell feels that there should not be any problems during the transition and offered the new board members his assistance.

## **Overview of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries**

Secretary Landreneau presented a video which contained an overview of the LDWF to the board members.

### **White Lake Property Presentation**

Greg Linscombe, Biologist, commented to the Board that he grew up in Gueydan and 37 years ago hunted geese on the agricultural lands at White Lake. He stated that he didn't really know what was across the Intracoastal, but it must be special because that was the direction that the white fronts came from every morning. Mr. Linscombe commented that when he was completing his thesis, he was fortunate to have been allowed to work on the White Lake marsh by Senator Jesse Knowles, who at that time was involved in managing the property. He stated that his most recent involvement with White Lake has been the work he has conducted with Mr. Wayne Sweeney over the last few years. He mentioned that in 2000, BP Amoco contracted for a detailed report covering all aspects of the property. The two volumes are entitled Baseline Documentation Report for BP Amoco White Lake and were prepared by two former employees of the department, Larry McNease and Allan Ensminger. Mr. Linscombe discussed the map and lands of the White Lake property that is #3 in the handout which was presented to the Board.

~~Mr. Leach inquired what was the source of the property's natural gas. Mr. Wayne Sweeney informed Mr. Leach that the property is receiving its natural gas supply from Hilcorp from the south Florence field adjacent to the pumps and stated there is no charge for the natural gas supply. Mr. Sweeney also informed the Board that during the fall, the staff starts gradually adding water back to the property, usually during the first week in October before the ducks start migrating down. He stated that area C is flooded with two 30 inch siphon pumps. There are water control structures on the 17,000 acre unit north of the refuge. These structures are used to manage and manipulate the water levels in the big marsh in area E and during the spring months the structures are opened to allow the water to gradually flow out, which depends on the water levels outside the marsh in the Mermentau Basin. The objective is to get the marsh down to marsh elevation down or six inches below marsh elevation during the summer months to allow for vegetation, growth, etc. During the fall, the stop-logs are placed back in the structures and it is brought back up to marsh elevation to six inches above marsh elevation. He stated that marsh elevation there is about 1.5 msl, so they target for about 2.0 msl during the winter months. He said they found that the less water they can hold and still get around in the marsh, the better it is for the waterfowl.~~

Mr. Sweeney reported to the Board, by request of Dr. Gomez, the condition of the levees. He stated there are approximately 35 miles of levee that are surrounding this area. Last year, the western levee coming down to White Lake going up and going across to the southeast corner of the school board section was rebuilt from a grant the property

received and they reconstructed approximately 11 miles of levee. Hilcorp, the oil and gas company that bought out the Amoco fields is helping maintain the levees along the Florence Canal because that is their route of ingress and egress from the boat landing coming all the way down to the west White Lake field. He said that Hilcorp recently completed a project costing approximately \$500,000, which included re-sloping and building up the levee systems along the Florence Canal on the east and west sides north of the Intracoastal and then they addressed some areas along the Florence Canal, south of the Intracoastal that were low areas which they built up by putting rock along the Florence Canal and Intracoastal intersection and they rocked the corners there. Mr. Sweeney stated that this is a contractual obligation for Hilcorp. He reported that the north levee of the refuge is in decent shape. Overall, Mr. Sweeney feels the levees that impound marsh areas C and E are in good shape except for the entrance canal levees that lead from the Florence Canal to the White Lake Lodge Facility.

Mr. Sweeney stated that there are erosion problems at White Lake along the southeastern side which will need to be addressed at some point in the future. Mr. Sweeney feels the most critical area is along the Intracoastal. Mr. Sweeney said that the Corps of Engineers was there a couple years ago and they had Congressman Boustany there a couple of weeks ago and they are currently in the process of developing and prioritizing a map for work that needs to be done along the Intracoastal. Mr. Sweeney stated Congressman Boustany is trying to get funds from Washington on a federal level and possibly to talk to the Corps on a federal level and see if they address some of the erosion problems. Mr. Sweeney stated he recently hired an engineering firm to address another critical area which is a two mile stretch along the Intracoastal.

Mr. Sweeney informed the Board that approximately 4,000 of the 5,000 acres of leased lands are being planted and they receive \$41 per base acre, which was the lease negotiated with BP prior to the donation. Mr. Sweeney stated that minus the 400 acres Mr. Trahan will not be planting this year will bring it down to 3,600 acres. Mr. Sweeney did say that they are paid by base acres and there are 5,000 base acres, so regardless if Mr. Trahan plants or not, he will still have to pay for the base acres. Mr. Sweeney stated that if the lessees are raising crawfish, there is an additional fee of \$15 per acre of harvested crawfish.

Mr. Greg Linscombe informed the Board that the employees from LDWF's Rockefeller Refuge have been conducting waterfowl surveys at White Lake and will continue surveying there. Mr. Linscombe also informed the board that they have lottery fishing currently going on consisting of 45 individuals fishing in the Florence Canal system. He stated there is an increasingly large number of groups' looking at ecotourism activities, such as bird watching and they have hunting on the property, consisting of both corporate and public hunts.

Mr. Sweeney informed the Board that the leases can not subleased. He also stated that management dictates how many blinds can be put on the property. He stated White Lake averages 2 blinds per section on the properties that are leased out for hunting. Mr. Sweeney stated that approximately 1,800 acres in the US Fish & Wildlife mini-refuge program and another 1,200 acres of the farm lands that are not leased out is where the rice field lottery hunting is conducted. Mr. Sweeney said he recalls the property having 12 hunting lessees and approximately 40,000 acres of property leased out for hunting, with approximately 40 blinds on the 40,000 acres. Mr. Sweeney stated that 17,000 acres of marsh that is leased to an individual and Mr. Sweeney believes this lessee has only eight blinds on the 17,000 acres. Mr. Sweeney stated the waterfowl lease on area B has been leased to the individual for nearly 40 years and he has a camp and launch facility east of the property. Mr. Sweeney stated the other hunting tenants have been leasing property for nearly 15 years. Mr. Sweeney said that agriculture lands were not used for hunting until Amoco decided to start leasing them out, and prior to the donation the hunting lessees with existing leases were given ten year contracts just like the agricultural lessees were given. Mr. Sweeney reported to Mr. Leach that the lessee with 17,000 acres pays per blind. Mr. Sweeney said he pays approximately \$20,000 per year for either seven or eight blinds that he has, which totals \$2,500 per blind. Dr. Gomez asked Mr. Sweeney what other activities in addition to the hunting leases took place in area B. Mr. Sweeney responded that bird watching tours, mud boat/airboat tours, wild alligator trapping, but it is basically hunting and alligator trapping, including alligator egg harvesting. Mr. Leach asked how many alligator permits the property has and Mr. Sweeney stated they generally receive 520 tags and last year they had four alligator trappers on the property. Mr. Sweeney stated prior to the donation, Amoco employees were performing the trapping on the property. Mr. Sweeney said this past year they failed to trap approximately 25 alligators. He stated they usually fill all of their tags, but last year he thinks they trapped approximately 500 alligators. Mr. Sweeney stated revenue derived from alligator trapping, both on the agricultural property and in the marsh was right at \$100,000 this past year. He said they collected \$80,000 for the eggs and approximately \$25,000 for the wild alligator trapping.

Ms. Annie Smith asked for more information regarding alligators. Mr. Noel Kinler, Alligator Program Manager of the Fur and Refuge Division stated the department operates what we refer to as an alligator farming and ranching program whereby the department permits, under a quota system, farmers to contract with private landowners to collect alligator eggs from their properties. Mr. Kinler stated they enter into a three-way permit agreement with the department to do so, and the concept is if you allow alligator eggs to incubate naturally in the marsh and grow up from hatchlings to large adult alligators, you have a tremendous amount of mortality that takes place from the time the egg is laid until the animal reaches about 4 to 5 feet in length so if you can capture the eggs that are deposited in the marsh and bring them into a controlled environment, you can eliminate the vast majority of that mortality, thus creating a system making the eggs very valuable to the landowners. The farmers to utilize that mortality and grow those animals and sell them for commercial sale and replace a specified portion of those animals back to the marsh, as what we refer to as our farm release program. Mr. Kinler

said what we are trying to do is replace the mortality in the wild by utilizing it and replace only the recruitment that would have occurred had you not collected the eggs. Farmers then return a specified portion of their alligators back to the wild to maintain the adult wild segment of the population. He stated we can also employ a harvest strategy to take some portion of those adults that would die from natural mortality. Mr. Kinler said we are trying to make full use of the alligator resources. Mr. Kinler informed Ms. Smith that the department's philosophy is to manage alligator resource with a sustained harvest management program and the real goal is to provide some benefit to the coastal landowners by managing the resource – placing that authority for wild harvest and egg harvest with the landowner so that he can gain some benefit from that resource on his property. Mr. Kinler stated the farmer receives a benefit from the sale of eggs and from the sale of skins and meat from the harvested farm raised alligators.

Dr. Gomez informed Ms. Smith that she wrote a book titled “The Wetlands Biography – Seasons on Louisiana Chenier Plain” and she would be happy to share a copy with Ms. Smith.

### **Election of Officers/Adoption of Rules of Procedure**

Secretary Landreneau addressed the Board and asked if they chose to have their election of officers today or postpone it to another meeting date once they have gotten acquainted with one another a little more. The Board elected to postpone this election until a later date.

Secretary Landreneau proposed the next board meeting be held Friday, June 3, 2005 at the White Lake property. Secretary Landreneau suggested conducting the business meeting that morning, have lunch, and then go to some site tours, with the department providing the transportation for the tours. The board members agreed to hold the meeting on that date. Secretary Landreneau stated we will meet at the boat dock at 9:30 a.m.

Mr. Leach suggested that all of the board members prepare a biographical sketch and email it to one another to become more familiar with the other members prior to their upcoming election of officers.

Mr. Donald Hale moved that the Board adopt Robert's Rules of Order until such time as the Board determines that formal by-laws are needed. The motion was approved by acclamation.

### **Other Business**

Lt. Col. Keith LaCaze addressed the Board and explained the Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcement of state and federal regulations and regulations promulgated by the LWFC, boating safety enforcement, as well as aspects associated with boating safety. Lt. Col. LaCaze stated they would like to meet with Mr. Sweeney to discuss ongoing problems the property has. He said they would like determine the relationship between the White Lake property and the community and how the community and

property interact. Lt. Col. LaCaze stated they are familiar with handling public access to refuge and WMA properties and making sure they comply with check-in/check-out requirements and rules while they are present visiting the facility. Lt. Col. LaCaze said they will have officers that will be assigned to patrol this area on a regular basis and that they are well staffed in that area right now and they are very well equipped in that portion of the state with airboats and outboards and other equipment they use to get into remote marsh areas. Lt. Col. LaCaze stated that this is a new project for them and they are very anxious to get involved with and start working the area.

Secretary Landreneau asked the Board to consider changing the name of White Lake to White Lake Conservation and Wetlands Area or to something similar to more appropriately describe the property. He asked the board members to think about names and to suggest any recommendations they come up with. He mentioned that this property is not a traditional WMA and must be managed differently, and at the same time we are looking at preservation, conservation, education, and presentation of the facility to the public.

Secretary Landreneau was asked how much in revenues was taken in last year from lottery hunts. He explained that the department is in the process of developing budgets and did not have the information, but stated Mr. Sweeney may be able to answer the question. Mr. Sweeney stated that they charge \$50 per person for the rice field hunt, \$100 per person for the marsh hunt during the teal hunts, \$150 per person during the regular hunting season. A total of \$32,550 was collected for the public lottery hunts conducted during the 2004-2005 waterfowl season and a total of \$275,000 was collected from the fund raising/corporate hunts.

The Board asked Mr. Sweeney how much did the private hunting leases bring into White Lake and he stated they bring in approximately \$100,000.

Concerns were voiced regarding repairs made last year by White Lake costing approximately \$360,000 and a letter received from farmers who stated they each spent between \$400,000 to \$600,000 per year on repairs and maintenance. Mr. Sweeney was asked if we were spending over \$1,000,000 per year on repairs and maintenance and he confirmed the farmers were probably spending \$400,000 to \$500,000 according to what they have reported to him. He stated that he would have a report on White Lake Preservation's operating expenses for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004 at the next board meeting.

Mr. Leach inquired about water bottoms and if White Lake received revenues from them. Secretary Landreneau informed the board that the department is currently working with the Office of State Lands regarding that issue. Mr. Leach requested a report on the issue at the next board meeting.

Dr. Gomez suggested that the Board receive a report listing all revenues and expenditures for White Lake at the next board meeting.

Secretary Landreneau discussed the transition of White Lake transferring management from a private board to the bureaucracy of state government. He commended Janice Lansing and Wynette Kees on their hard work. He stated the department has met with Civil Service and the department received permission to do what we need to work with the employees there.

Mr. Eddie Young stated that he would like to hold a public meeting for his constituents in Gueydan and the surrounding area to answer any questions they may have regarding White Lake. Secretary Landreneau suggested waiting until after the next board meeting before meeting with them, once the election of officers has taken place, and have a town hall meeting in Gueydan to discuss management plans, as well as any concerns they may have.

Ms. Lana Guidry will be updating a list of White Lake Property Advisory Board Member addresses, phone numbers, etc. and will email all board members a copy of this document.

### **Adjournment**

Secretary Landreneau commented to the Board that this is a major undertaking for all of them and he definitely appreciates them for agreeing to serve on this Advisory Board. He stated that we all have a lot of work to do, but thinks we can be very successful in this endeavor.

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There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.



Dwight Landreneau  
Secretary

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