



2024 Torchbearr Annual Report



Letter From Our Staff Leadership

As 2024 comes to a close and 2025 kicks off, one thing is clear. Wildfire won't wait for any of us to get our stuff together. What's more, a growing body of evidence suggests that, the more we put off the prescribed burning at increased scales that we know we need to do, the worse our wildfire risk gets.

Here's the good news. Our non-profit organization Torchbearr has also decided not to wait. We are taking a pro-active approach to accomplishing our mission of promoting prescribed fire for a brighter fire future for all.

We are happy to report that in the past year our burn bosses have been able to burn almost 5,000 acres in partnership with collaborators, and instructed eight training sessions with a diversity of students - 198 total - across Northern California. The majority of those students have been Tribal participants, with a host of others overcoming different disadvantaged circumstances to be engaged. We continue to employ motivated students from our classes as assistant instructors and personnel on burns, thus not only increasing capacity to do more burning, but also creating a pipeline for trainee and qualified burn personnel to gain hands-on experience and employment as fire practitioners.

Too often in fire we fire practitioners encounter excuses for why we can't burn; liability, lack of funding, need for legally required studies and other types of planning, need for the right government-sanctioned qualifications and PPE (personal protective equipment), lack of overtime and

hazard pay to compete with fire suppression, denial of permits, fear of fire, racism, public complaints about air quality... the list goes on and on. And who loses when we make excuses for not burning? ALL OF US!

Your support in helping us flip that script so that we are looking for and seizing chances to burn and get others involved and inspired to do so too means so much to us here at Torchbearr. We started this organization with the intent that it would serve as a vehicle for getting more good fire on the ground. With great partners and allies like you, we've been able to do just that. We are proud of our success stories, like students in our trainings who ask for assignments on fire engines, teaching cadres, and prescribed burns, and property owners who take initiative to burn their own piles and back 40.

Looking back, it's hard to believe how far we've come, and looking forward, we can see our hard work and investment of resources start to pay off. Thanks to bold, visionary people like you who are willing to take a risk and support groups like Torchbearr, we are poised to accomplish even more in the years ahead.

With so much uncertainty ahead, let's dig into local and regional community building, watershed restoration, and wildfire resiliency together with all we've got. When all else fails, these efforts will be what save us.

With gratitude,

Torchbearr Co-Founders

Erica and Scot Steinbring



We're Stronger Together—Thanks To Our Partners!

Torchbearr couldn't do much without strong partnerships and collaborative working relationships. We have worked extensively in 2024 with North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP), California Indian Environmental Alliance (CIEA), the Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP), the Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC), Conservation Corp North Bay (CCNB), Pacific Forest Trust, Van Eicht Forest, Mendocino Fire Safe Council, and the Covelo Prescribed Burn Association. Additionally, we are proud to have partnered

with the Round Valley Tribe, Coyote Valley Tribe, Redwood Valley Tribe, Pinoleville Tribe, Quartz Valley Tribe, and Paskenta Tribe in 2024. We were also happy to leverage our resources and partnership with Warriors to Wildfire and Bullhide Fire to support prescribed burning and training efforts by the Mid Klamath Watershed Council, Karuk Tribe and numerous others in the past year. We have also provided requested training for Grayback Forestry, Bella Forestry, and multiple other fire contractors. We continue to

converse and cooperate with Cal Fire to seek solutions to permitting barriers from local unit to regional and state levels, and we appreciate their continued commitment to listening to our practitioner perspectives, responding quickly when we raise issues, and working with us to get more good fire on the ground in spite of many obstacles.



Training The Present

Our lead Burn Boss and Torchbearr Operations Director Scot Steinbring likes to say: “We train the present, or we will repeat the past and fail the future.” To that end, Torchbearr offered four basic fire school training, one chainsaw training, one fire career development training, one fire refresher training, one wildfire risk assessment training, and one prescribed fire smoke management training this year. 196 of these students received 166 certificates and 65 fire qualifications through these classes, while 34 students went on to get a job or take an assignment in fire after our training. Each of these training advances students towards qualification and career goals in fire, and helps to increase the number of trained and available fire practitioners and leaders.



Burn Like A Boss

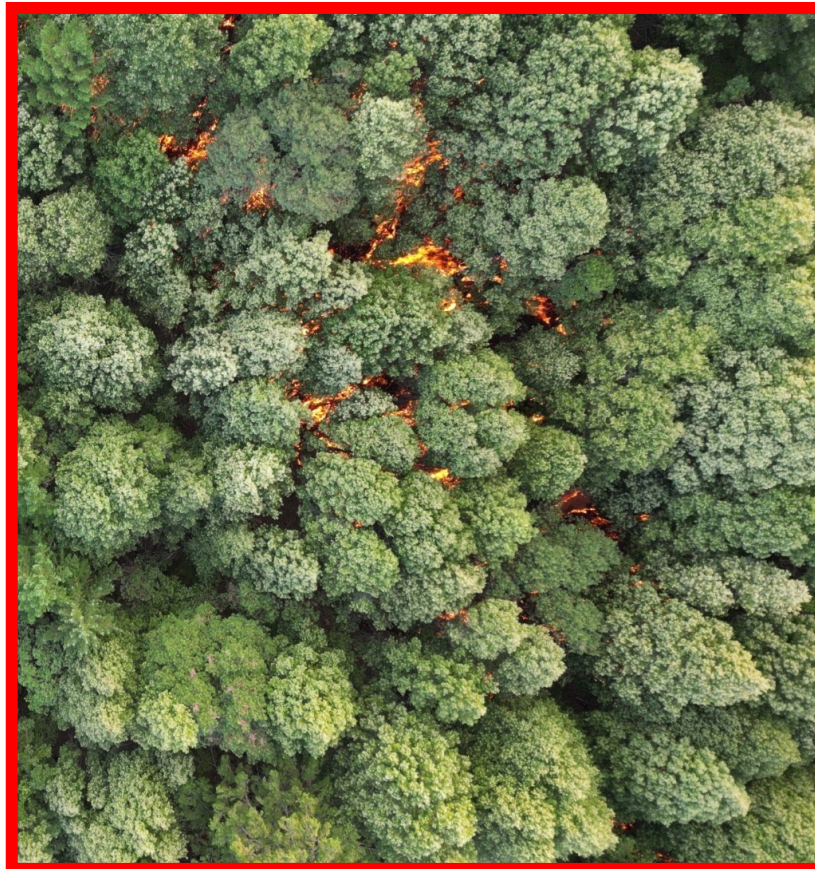


Torchbarr assists partners in burning wherever in the USA we're asked. Mostly, that takes us to various parts of California where we're incorporated, but we venture as far as Oregon, Nebraska, and New Mexico sometimes.

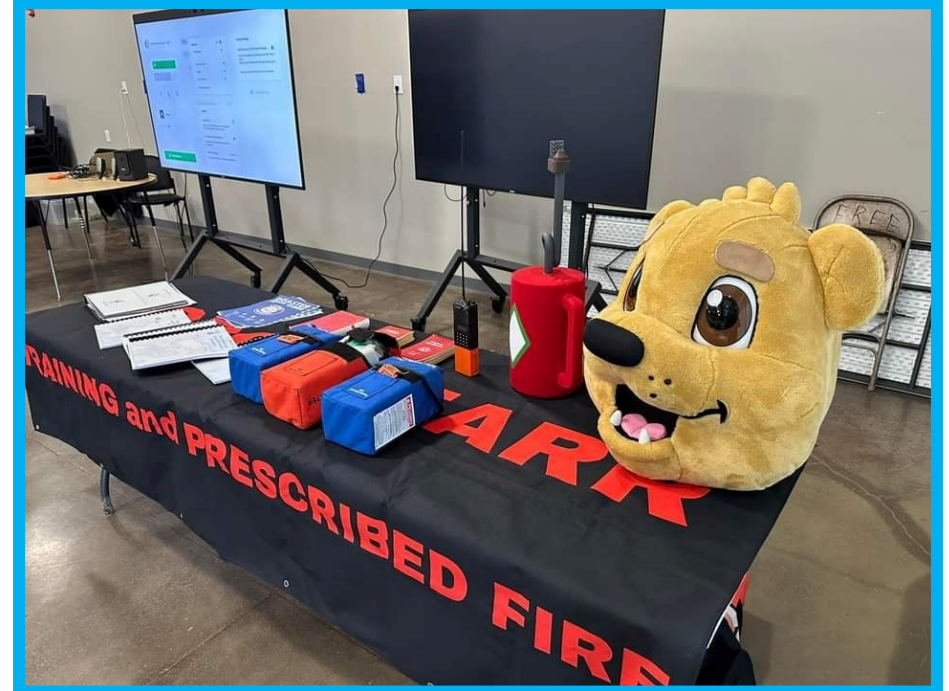
This year our burning was mainly concentrated around Laytonville and Fieldbrook, California, while providing some support and assistance for burning in the Fort Bragg area, Ukiah area, Orleans/Somes Bar area, and in the Sierras at

the request of Tribes and private property owners. We also burned for Nebraska Fish and Wildlife, giving one of our former students her first taste of a real live prescribed fire assignment and helping her to get some ink in her task book.

We have burned 60 acres of piles and applied 4,849.3 acres of understory fire in 2024, while helping to plan and prep 2,700 acres of ground.



We All Have Skin In The Game



After much consideration, our Torchbearr board made the decision to absorb the 501(c)4 lobbying non-profit called Torchbearr Action that we formed at the same time we started Torchbearr. This decision made in 2024 followed a Torchbearr Action Board vote to dissolve. There were many reasons for this move, the biggest being the need to focus resources on one organization. Since 501(c)3 public benefit charities like Torchbearr are legally permitted to use a small but significant percent of their budgets on political activities, and public education is already part of our mission, this streamlining of organizations just made good sense.

To incorporate some of the policy change goals of Torchbearr Action

into Torchbearr's work, we are launching a "Skin In the Game Program" that will house several exciting initiatives including: more Fire Friday educational events, continued participation and collaboration in existing national coalitions to reform fire policy, a sorely needed vintners and fire practitioners dialogue and alliance, a legal aid clinic for landowners, advocacy for easier prescribed fire permitting and removal of other barriers, and an innovative theater production to help society look in the mirror at our fear of fire and how it impacts us.

We are looking forward to telling you more about this work in 2025 as we get it moving!

Untangling The Prescribed Fire Permitting Web



Torchbearr has dedicated countless hours this past year to pressing Cal Fire to create clear, consistent permitting standards that will aid burn bosses in successful burn planning and implementation. After repeatedly running into arbitrary burn restrictions and permit denials at the local Cal Fire Unit level, particularly in some geographic areas where old cultures and fear of fire still prevail, Torchbearr began filing public records requests to obtain data from the state fire management agency. At the same time, Torchbearr documented the barriers our organization (and others) continue to run into, with burn restrictions often issued by the wrong agency based on a lack of sound scientific data while similar permits were issued on other units at the same time. We sent a letter detailing our experiences and concerns to Cal Fire in July, and have corresponded numerous times since with state Cal Fire representatives.

These documentations and correspondence have resulted in Cal Fire agreeing to convene a meeting or series of meetings to address these permitting problems that too often hinder application of good

fire on the ground. We believe that public resources code already contains the tools needed for Cal Fire units to justify issuing permits in many cases when they currently refuse to do so, and we'll be making that case and supporting Cal Fire leadership in offering local units education about how to justify those decisions so they can permit more prescribed burns while standing on solid legal ground moving forward.

Although we currently have no resources in our budget to cover this staff time, we still consider this time well spent because it is mission critical. Without permits to burn, much of Torchbearer's work simply cannot move forward. We are hopeful that we can identify some key partners interested in funding some of this type of targeted advocacy work to overcome prescribed fire barriers. Please reach out to planning@torchbearr.org if you might be one of those partners!

Liability Insurance Renewed (And Improved)!

We are delighted to report that we managed, by the skin of our teeth, to renew our pricey but essential private prescribed fire insurance coverage for another year! And, we changed insurance carriers. Our new carrier has shown a much more progressive and astute understanding of our industry, offering an insurance package that is more tailored to our needs, less exploitative of its clients, provides higher quality coverage, is more convenient and is at least a little bit more affordable. This is an exciting development, and we are one of just a handful of clients in California offered this option this coming year in its inaugural run. Much as prescribed fire permits are mission critical, this insurance coverage is also vital in a world where fear of liability for burning is the biggest and most common hurdle we must struggle to overcome. This insurance policy provides our board and partners peace of mind, enabling us to confidently make decisions to burn (instead of choosing not to.)



Back To The Future! To 2025 and Beyond...

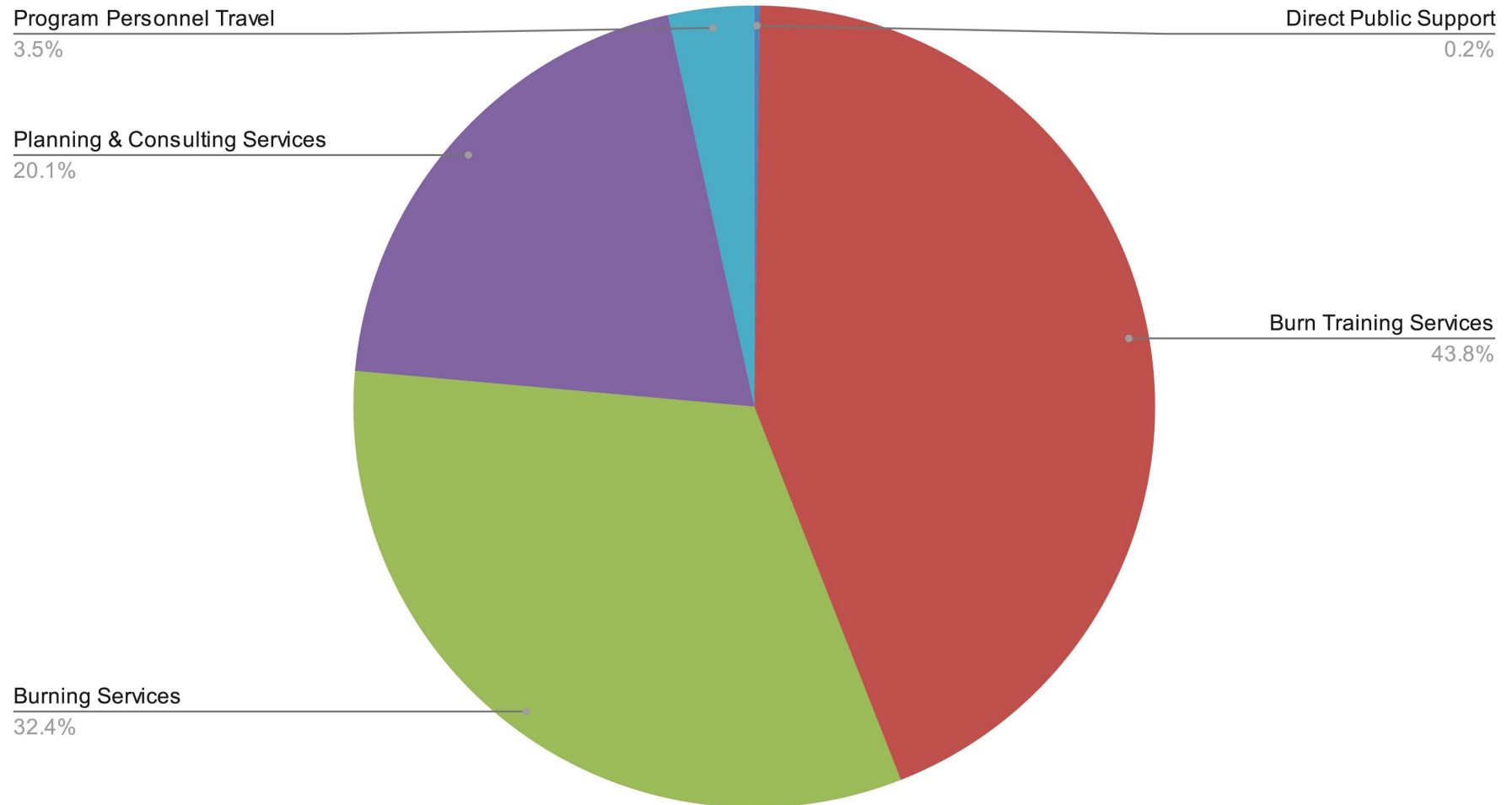
As some things fall into place after years of hard work and plenty of failures along the way, we find hope in the fact that we are grounded in our relationships with you, the communities we serve. We love empowering people and communities to burn more, inspiring and mentoring individuals to start and advance careers in fire, seeing our partners build capacity and get noticed and supported for it and then find ways to support each other, and getting out in the field to do more together. We love being asked to help, and most of our work training and burning is done in response to requests for help. Many of the groups that approach us in need of help are Tribes seeking to establish and grow fire programs. And no wonder. Intentional fire is not a new concept, but a very old one that we know works, and one we are honored to play a bit part in getting back to using on the land.

There are many things to love about prescribed fire. It fosters cultures that are inherently self-sufficient in nature, that tend to maintain their own equilibrium (with a lot of hard work and commitment to the cause of fire return intervals), and not at all profit driven yet generate priceless other kinds of wealth that benefit everyone. Mostly though, we love you, the champions of prescribed fire who show up to work with us in all kinds of conditions, including some very challenging ones. THANK YOU, and see you in 2025!



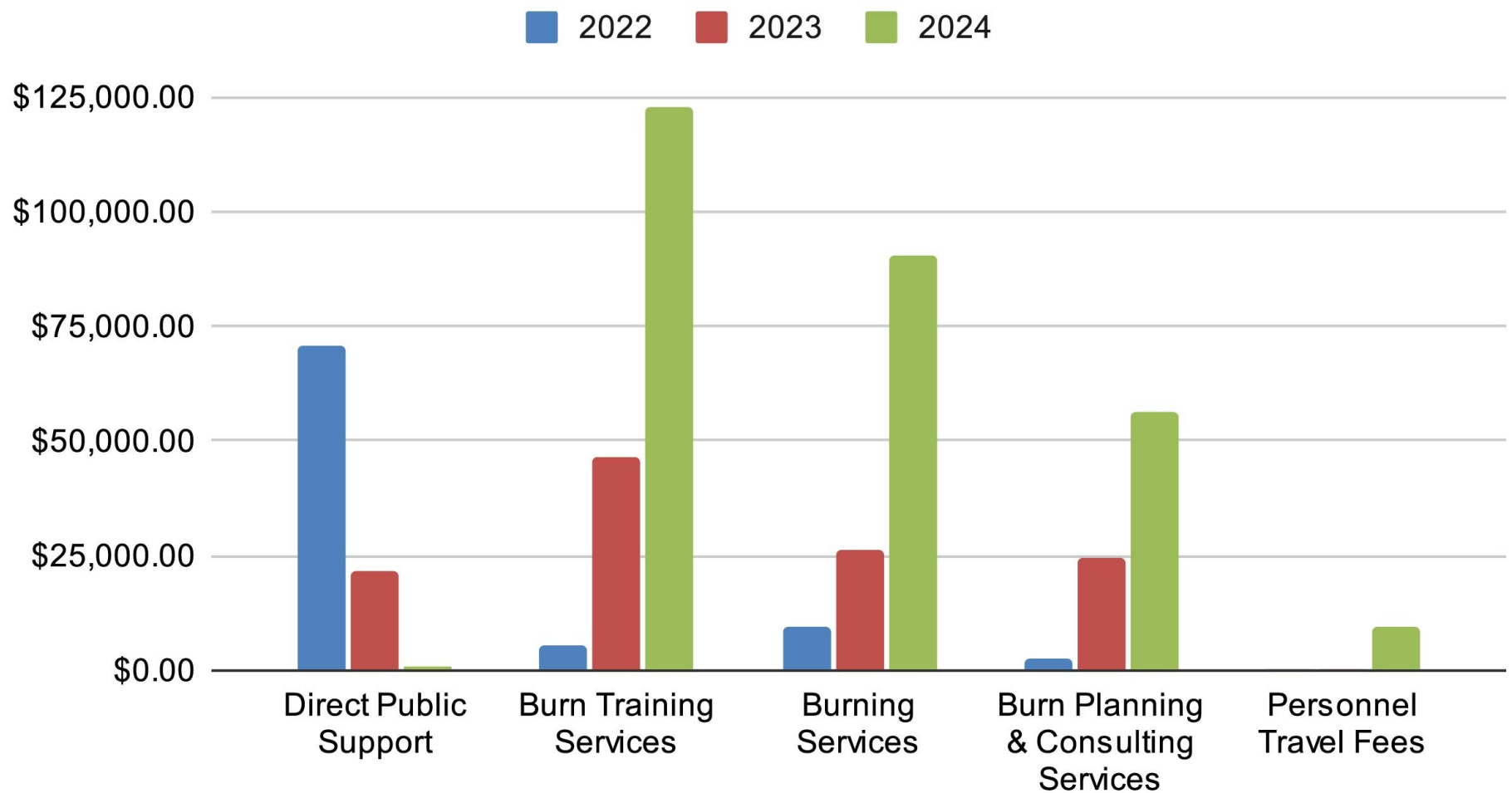
Torchbearr's Funding Resilience Shows In 2024 Revenue

2024 Revenue Sources



Demand For Prescribed Fire and Torchbearr Services Is Undeniable

2022-2024 Revenue Comparison



Torchbearr Expanded Operations in 2024! Thanks To You!



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