



CRYSTAL CLEAR

Summer, 2020

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We Can't Dam Our Way Out of Climate Change

It's June, and the Crystal River has reached its peak.

With a slightly above normal snowpack this year it looked like there would be adequate water over the summer, but the warm spring weather is causing a rapid runoff and now we're below average. By August the river could be quite low, and by October barely any water may reach the Roaring Fork.

In Colorado and the western states, water is very valuable and in high demand.

Unfortunately, water laws were written when water was more plentiful, the population was much smaller, and the climate seemed stable. Back in 1922 the Colorado Compact, an effort to provide water from the Colorado River equitably from the Upper Basin states (which had the snowpack) to the lower basin states (which had the population) tried to look into the future and settle the water claims of the Colorado River. The Compact was lauded for looking to the future, but it failed in some big ways.

While assuming the snow packs of the 1920s were normal and would continue into the future, the Compact underpredicted future demand and over predicted water supply. It did not foresee climate change and a desire to maintain natural habitats. Now, a hundred years later, it is threatening to fall apart.

The Crystal River is in many ways under the same threats. We can look back just three years to when the Crystal was barely a trickle during the summer, and fishermen were told not to fish during the heat of the days because of the stress on fish. While some years there is enough water, climate change will cause them

to be fewer and fewer. Now is the time to ask some tough questions:

- *How much do we value the free-flowing nature of the Crystal River (one of only two rivers in Colorado that is free of dams)?*
- *Should we continue to allow development in the Crystal River Valley when water is already over allocated?*
- *Should we dam the Crystal to provide water for homes and subdivisions that were built even when developers knew there would be water shortages?*

When voters narrowly approved Proposition DD last November there was little knowledge of how the revenues raised from taxing gambling would be spent. Many read the "arguments for DD" and agreed: "Water is a scarce resource in Colorado, and the demand will continue to increase as the state's population grows. Colorado's economy and way of life, from urban cities to agricultural communities, will suffer if the state cannot meet its water demands."

Gary Wockner, Director of *Save the Colorado* disagreed: "This 'Gambling For Dams' bill is a climate-denying, river-destroying scheme pure and simple. To think that Colorado can dam its way out of climate change is a gamble of the highest stakes."

The West Divide Water Conservation District is using the new funds generated from Proposition DD to study storing water from the Crystal River, most likely on one of the side streams such as Yule Creek. They

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received a grant and have stated that “there will be continued outreach meetings”. CVEPA has reached out to West Divide and asked to be part of the outreach, but has not received any reply. Not surprisingly, the “outreach” is only to water users.

We are repeating the same problems – continuing to “develop” water resources so more and more can be consumed, despite the fact that there is going to be less and less of it.

CVEPA has concerns: Rather than looking at limiting growth in the Crystal Valley, where the water is already over allocated, West Divide seems intent on damming the tributaries, which will affect the free flowing nature of the Crystal River. The natural

systems of the river seem to take back seat to future development. CVEPA has suggested West Divide look into water conservation measures, buying water rights from farmers, and other low impact solutions. CVEPA had planned a “State of the Valley” forum to address water and other issues this spring, but the pandemic has delayed it.

It’s time we quit assuming growth can go on forever. We are lucky to live by one of the only free flowing rivers in Colorado. We need a community vision of what this valley should look like in the future, and hopefully we’ll do better than those that wrote the Colorado River Compact. —Peter Westcott

Coal Basin Memorial

The Redstone Coke Oven Historic District is located at the intersection of SH 133 and Chair Mountain Stables Road in historic Redstone, Colorado. In 1990, the Coke Ovens were recognized as an historic district and listed on the National Register of Historic Places through the National Park Service. A visitor’s platform includes a piece of mining equipment, part of the famous “Long Wall,” recognizing the mining history in Coal Basin of the Mid Continent Mining Company.

Restoration of the Coke Ovens followed comprehensive research by Ron and Michelle Sorter and friends several years ago. Currently, Brian Pettet, director of the Pitkin County Coke Oven Site project, is completing an enhancement and restoration project surrounding the Coke Ovens and the Monument.

New to the site is a Memorial sign acknowledging the miners of Colorado Fuel and Iron (1900-1909) and Mid Continent (1956-1991), men whose lives were lost in tragic mine-related accidents. Committed to the concept of remembrance and recognition of the miners to whom we owe our history in the Crystal Valley, Bill Jochems led the research for the Coal Miners Memorial Sign Monument. His dedication to the project and the recognition and identification of the miners by name adds to the value of the site and provides an opportunity for all to review our valley’s history and the contributions of those who came before.

HISTORY:

The coke ovens helped to establish the town of Redstone in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s by attracting workers to live and work in the small community. Miners transported coal from the Coal Basin Mine above the town and Redstone’s cokers loaded it into the tops of the 249 ovens. After the coal cooked for 2 days, it turned into “coke” which is fuel for blast furnaces. Cokers would then rake the coke out through

the front of the ovens and load it onto train cars to be transported to Pueblo, Colorado to be used in the steel mill.

The town of Redstone originally existed because of the historic coke ovens. Founded at the turn of the 20th century, Redstone was the vision and venture of one man: The “Fuel King of the West,” John Cleveland Osgood. Redstone was a company town, constructed solely to house the men who worked the ovens and their families. After decades of not being used, these historic coke ovens deteriorated due to weather, erosion, vandalism, and plant growth.

WHAT ARE COKE OVENS?

These “beehive” coke ovens were constructed in the late 1890s to carbonize (or “coke”) coal mined in Coal Basin to the west for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. The coke ovens were constructed from firebrick and are known as “beehives” due to their resemblance to old beehives. Coal was loaded through a hole in the top and converted to coke by burning the coal in an oxygen-deficient environment. The coke was then removed through a second opening in the front of each oven and loaded onto rail cars and shipped to various locations for use in smelting ores and for the production of steel. Coal and its derivative coke are still used by some blacksmiths on a small scale. —Dorothea Farris



Meet Francie Jacober

Candidate for Pitkin County Commissioner District 5

CVEPA invited both candidates for Pitkin County Commissioner for District 5 to introduce themselves to our readership. Jeffrey Evans' column will appear in our Fall, 2020 issue. As a 501c3 organization, CVEPA will not endorse any candidate.

I am running for Pitkin County Commissioner at a strange time. I thought when I decided to run that my attention would be largely focused on "the environment". Environmental issues have been paramount in my mind and heart for most of my life. I imagined that as a County Commissioner, the first issues that would garner my attention would be protecting the natural environment in our valley as well as contributing to efforts to slow climate change. Now, however, I find myself in a reality where *Black Lives Matter* protests, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a government at all levels facing difficult challenges, dominate the headlines and our minds. The empathy required to read the news and watch footage everyday results in a continual focus on how to discover and enhance our inner compassion and tolerance, and how to recognize our own prejudices, buried as they may be in our earnest efforts to accept others and practice kindness.

Yet we cannot let the environment slip to the back burner as we become immersed in the compelling issues of today. As a candidate to represent the Crystal River Valley—as well as all of Pitkin County—I am fully committed to working towards improving the lives of everyone who lives here. I am equally committed to preserving our natural environment. It is not easy, however, to separate or balance the two. There are questions to which we must seek answers—as commissioners but also as citizens.

- If we continue to offer affordable housing on the amount of open land we have for development, do we infringe on possibilities for open space designation – and vice versa?
- If we continue to clear and expand trails for bikers and hikers and make them accessible with more and more parking for cars, do we then reduce wildlife habitat and migration routes?
- If we boost our local economy with hunting and fishing licenses, promotion of trails, and improved campgrounds, do we fill up our wilderness with so much recreation that it barely resembles wilderness?
- What is the impact on traffic and pollution of bringing in tourists, hunters, skiers, peepers, hikers, nightlife-seekers, restaurant clients – all of whom contribute to our economy, bring in tax revenues, provide jobs for our citizens, and enrich our lives in many ways?
- How do we justify the influence of big money on desired building codes and restrictions?
- How do we balance the impacts of industry, such as mining, with the needs of wildlife?
- And how can we maintain the beautiful rural character of our valley with the inevitable increase in population and development?

My inclination has been to err on the side of conservation - less development, fewer trails, reduced access

to sensitive wildlife areas. But I do not pretend to have the answers to all these questions, but I commit myself to listening to various viewpoints, studying the science, and engaging in research to find plausible solutions. People want answers and immediate solutions, but asking the right questions comes first. By anticipating issues, rather than reacting to them, the BOCC can be significantly more effective.

While I have personal opinions about some of the Crystal Valley (and greater Pitkin County) issues, I know that as a commissioner I would need to be open to others' viewpoints. Listening is one of the most important jobs of someone in a position to affect decisions. I need to be flexible and willing to change my mind when confronted with compelling evidence and argument, while not overly compromising my own beliefs.

For instance, I am strongly opposed to damming the Crystal River and in favor of Wild and Scenic Designation. I recognize there are those who believe a dam or diversion within the Crystal River watershed could help satisfy Colorado's appetite for more water to support increased population and development.

I was initially concerned about some of the impacts of the proposed Crystal River Bike Trail. Most of those impacts have been intensely studied and mitigations have been proposed, so my early hesitation about supporting that trail have been ameliorated. I have been approached by many people who have demanded my opinion on that trail. Some are vehemently against it; some support it. My biggest concern would be the development of secondary trails, but before stating a definitive conclusion, I continue to look to the science and the guidance of the studies as well as to the concerns of those affected by its construction.

Fortunately, Pitkin County itself contains a number of highly active governmental and non-profit organizations which work to solve our environmental problems. CVEPA, Wilderness Workshop, ACES, CORE, AVLTL, and others have already worked tirelessly to develop protections for our natural resources to affect positive change. The Board of County Commissioners, working with other entities, is highly proactive in protecting our environment and finding forward-thinking and cutting-edge solutions to our climate issues.

I consider it a privilege to live in a community which is proactive and future-oriented. I recognize the immense problems we face as we strive to minimize our contributions to climate change; improve the quality of life for all our citizens; equalize educational opportunities throughout the Valley; strive for accessible childcare, a stable workforce, and affordable housing; and balance the competing demands of development and conservation. I look forward to the opportunity to serve this community which is home to my family and in which I have lived for thirty years. (You can find out more about me at www.franciejacob.com .)

Environmental Ethics

Remember the days of “walk softly”, “take only pictures, leave only footprints,” the days when we left no waste in the wilderness? No dogs meant NO DOGS! Gate closed meant stay out. Stay on trails meant “no bandit trails”, NO Camping meant NO Camping. Those who feel that because we live here we have a “right” to the public lands within our reach need to review their positions, or our special places will be destroyed.....Maroon Bells, Hanging Lake, Conundrum Hot Springs, Four Mountain Pass, Rio Grande Trail, biking trails.....pick your special place.

We live in an area that promotes the environment for recreation, lifestyle, and economic advancement. Promoting a healthy environment requires a clear understanding of its value. True progress in the fight to save the environment cannot be achieved until a philosophically acceptable theoretical framework for environmental ethics and the implications of that framework are worked out. Our values must reflect short term benefits and costs while respecting future generations and the interconnectedness of humans with the life systems that compose nature. Nature must be recognized as having intrinsic value, not only its resource value. We need a new environmental philosophy.

We must link values and ethical concerns when business crosses into environmental conflict. We must facilitate the incorporation of environmental ethics into decision making. We have a responsibility to make practical, implementable recommendations to put principles into action. Environmental ethics must be included in policy formation. Business must be reformed to be ecofriendly, but we need to provide attractive incentives for business to adopt environmentally sound practices. We must acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of our nation’s regulatory agencies, the White River National Forest , the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Wildlife, the valley’s governmental agencies, and the many local groups and businesses that focus on protection of the environment.

Environmental Ethics must move beyond academic discussion and into the policy arena if we are to deal with global environmental conflicts such as consumption versus conservation or the needs of our economies versus environmental protection. Environmental ethics must be inserted into decision making at all levels of business and government. Those of us who are interested in incorporating ethics and values in how we treat our environment must apply to our own lives what we expect business, government, and other individuals to do. Instead of complaining about registrations, and restrictions, rules and regulations, crowds, and misuse of our resources, we must recognize the numbers of visitors and guests and members of our growing population and help them realize the need for an ethic that works for business, life style, and respect for our fragile environment.

—Dorothea Farris

Best Wishes For A Friend

We recently learned that Darrell and Jane Munsell are moving to Canyon, Texas this summer. As many of us can relate, they have family in the area and look forward to being closer to them.

Darrell is the gifted wordsmith who was responsible for some of the most notable contributions to our knowledge of the Crystal Valley, its history and its characters. He may be best known for “From Redstone to Ludlow: John Cleveland Osgood’s Struggle Against the United Mine Workers of America.” But CVEPA has also benefited from his gift for research and his passion for the area with his most recent book, “Protecting A Valley and Saving a River.” This volume provides a comprehensive look at our organization’s history and impact on this place we all hold dear. Both publications are available on amazon.com.

It’s hard to imagine not seeing Darrell and Jane in the valley. In addition to CVEPA, Darrell served as a member of the Redstone Historic Preservation Commission, and along with Jane, the Redstone Historic Society. We will miss their contributions to the Crystal Valley, their passion and commitment, and their cordial friendship. We wish them all the best.

CVEPA NOTICES

Plans for this year’s **Annual Meeting**, normally held the last Saturday of August, have been impacted by COVID-19. We are considering options that would allow us to communicate in safety and will inform you of our plans as soon as we can.

When was the last time you visited our website? **CVEPA.org** has recently undergone a revamp and we’d love for you to check it out. You can read past issues of the “Crystal Clear,” learn about our current projects, and refer friends to join our organization there. We would appreciate your feedback.

Did you know you can receive the “Crystal Clear” via **email**? Just send your email address to: smeredithorr@outlook.com and save a tree!

Crystal Streambank Restoration

Pitkin County's Open Space and Trails program is wrapping up a significant riparian restoration project on the Crystal River just above the Thomas Road Bridge. Significant erosion of the steep streambank occurred in 2019 as a result of extended high flows on the Crystal River. The resulting bank failure cut back to the edge of the Crystal Trail and an irrigation ditch that is piped beneath it. The resulting vertical drop to the river exposed loose soils that would have continued to erode and ultimately threaten State Highway 133.

Since the construction of the Crystal Railroad in 1893, the banks of the river have been continually armored by riprap to protect the myriad roads, driveways, and highway that now bracket the river in many locations. While bare riprap does protect road structures, it is ecologically sterile, and degrades both aquatic and riparian habitat. Rather than simply re-armoring the problem area, the Open Space program opted to stabilize the steep bank with a bioengineered approach. While more expensive than the typical riprap, the bioengineered strategy was chosen to help restore the physical landscape, ensuring long term stability and enhancing the riparian zone and ecological function of this area. The project addressed the critical zone of erosion and was extended on both sides of the critical zone to tie in the new hillslope to the pre-existing intact streambank.

The open space design consists of 3 basic components:

1. A **boulder revetment and floodplain deck/wetland restoration zone** that defines the river channel and prevents migration back toward the highway while also serving to disperse the river's energy when flows get high enough to overtop this floodplain "bench". This area contains wetland plantings and wil-

low stakes that have had a great success rate so far this spring.

2. A **riparian restoration zone**, transitioning the floodplain bench to the upland hillslope. A targeted seed mix and riparian plants (cottonwood, dogwood, alder, willow, etc.) were planted here with erosion control matting and a temporary irrigation system to help ensure plant establishment and seed germination. Once established, this zone will provide long-term erosion control naturally, and riparian habitat and connectivity where there was none before!



3. The **upland restoration zone**. A large amount of fill was required to address the steep critical zone of erosion, and then the careful placement of boulders and large native logs into the hillslope created a more organic look and function. The microclimates created by these boulders and logs are beneficial for dryland seed and upland plant establishment (sagebrush, serviceberry, antelope bitterbrush, etc.). These local materials and ecologically oriented design are not only

more aesthetic than traditional riprap, they will also contribute to long-term bank stability and create more native habitat.

Much credit for this admirable bio-engineering project goes to Liza Mitchell, Natural Resource Planner & Ecologist at Open Space and Trails. The County was also assisted in the designed by SGM and DHM, and the delicate in-river construction was performed by Gould, with SPI providing the restoration landscaping. The project was also supported by Bill Fales and Cold Mountain Ranch. This innovative work can be viewed along the Crystal Trail just upstream of Thomas Road where the new wooden fence is installed.

—Dale Will

A Problem That Won't Go Away



CDOT Debris Along Horseshoe Bend, Summer 2018.

The Colorado Department of Transportation's handling of the debris dump site at the base of McClure Pass has been discussed, labored over and written about for years without resolve. Yet CDOT now plans additional projects for State Highway 133 without having honored the management plan for Horseshoe Bend Dump Site.

In the summer of 2007 CVEPA notified the US Forest Service about extensive mud and rockslide spoils being dumped on Forest lands above Placita on SH 133. The USFS was unaware that CDOT had been dumping on this public land for years.

USFS ordered CDOT to halt their unauthorized dumping at the Placita site. The highway department had planned to dump overburden for more than ½ mile by several hundred yards wide and many meters deep all the way to Placita.

Public lands are your lands. If you see something that doesn't look right, it's probably because it isn't. Report strange activity or disturbances. CVEPA is not a board, it is you and I watching, working and protecting our valley!

Spurred by CVEPA's mission to, among other points, preserve the environment and its scenic resources, we identified a dumpsite at the deep basin at the horseshoe bend at the foot of McClure pass. This solution was embraced by both USFS and CDOT as an acceptable location. CVEPA continued to meet with USFS personnel for the next several years and was a contributor to the management plan.

Since that time, CVEPA has observed painfully slow, and often no, progress on the feasibility study, the Environmental Assessment, and the draft and final management plans. However, the management plan for

the Horseshoe Dump Site was finally accepted in 2016.

Last summer looked promising when CDOT hauled in tons of organic soils only to bulldoze them into the debris. But in a frustrating move, CDOT re-opened the Placita dumpsite, decommissioned by management plan, and resumed dumping debris. Again, CVEPA reported this transgression to USFS who ordered a stop to the activity.

Aspen-Sopris District Ranger Kevin Warner is now the fourth ranger to inherit this stalled process. We have been sympathetic to the federal cutbacks in spending and manpower, government shutdowns and now the Covid 19 crisis, but are frustrated by the lack of response to our concerns with the lack of progress on this project.

Now, in 2020, we have observed the failure of CDOT to complete the requirements of the management plan and the lack of resolve by the USFS in holding CDOT accountable.

The site is along the famous West Elk Scenic Byway. It is currently littered with used tires, a discarded culvert and rockslide material. Completion of CDOT's responsibility to provide screening is woefully simple. The 8' tall berm which extends approximately 180 degrees around the dumpsite can be completed in short order. CVEPA has offered to muster a volunteer revegetation crew to contribute to the reclamation.

Now, CDOT is in the planning stage of an extensive rockfall mitigation project that would take place during the summer of 2021 between Hayes Creek Falls and Placita. CVEPA applauds the state's effort and outreach and is on the stakeholders' group.

Unfortunately, we cannot support another major project along the highway until CDOT fulfills their obligation to complete the Horseshoe Bend worksite.

At the time of this article, CDOT has not responded to our emails or phone calls. The USFS has acknowledged numerous problems with CDOT compliance.

CVEPA appreciates the hard work of CDOT and the USFS and we also realize that patient politesse have gained us nothing in the four plus years since the management plan was adopted. We plan to take more aggressive action to bring this restoration plan to fruition.

Encourage the USFS to advance the implementation of the CDOT Horseshoe Bend Management Plan now by emailing michael.braudis@usda.gov and kevin.warner@usda.gov

—John Armstrong

CVEPA Continues to Advocate for Public Access

With our world being turned upside down this spring, people are seeking new and different ways to get out in the mountains.

One of my earliest hikes this year took me on a couple of trails within walking distance of Redstone. Not willing to divulge my “special places” I will say that the walks were easy, wooded with meadows and happily, with water.

What prompts me to write about this short hike expands to something much greater than the perambulation. Within an hour I crossed two parcels of public land of differing jurisdictions. Both had “no trespassing, private property” signs. Having worked for both the US Forest Service and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails I have a good knowledge of public lands and access in our area. The signs were old and weatherworn, but the verbiage was clear.

CVEPA will always encourage people to respect private property and “to play by the rules”. We also want people “to know before you go” and to defend your public access. If you have doubts or questions, obtain information from a definitive source. It has never been easier to get bona fide information with maps, GIS and other sources. (Remember, Conservation Easements may or may not allow access.)

Public Access is your right and if you do not stand up for it now you can be sure that your children and their children will not enjoy the same privileges that you do. Your access to public land in the western states has never been more challenged.

As the last private parcels are being bought and developed, we need to be vigilant to preserve our historic access. On areas of lesser-used rights of way, we may be required to prove historic use to preserve it.

Two instances of public access are in CVEPA’s sights right now.

CVEPA is endeavoring to preserve access to the Yule Creek Waterfall on the south side of Beaver Lake in Marble. If you have been a user of the old road to the falls let a board member know you cherish this access today.

At the other end of the Crystal Valley, public access near the historic Satank Bridge is under threat.

Ten years ago, two visionaries and facilitators, John Martin (Garfield County Commissioner) and John Hoffman (CVEPA Board member and West Elk Byway Board member) worked tirelessly to preserve the 120 year old Satank Bridge over the Roaring Fork River. The oldest wooden trussed bridge in the state, the iconic bridge links cyclists and pedestrians to the adjacent Rio Grande Trail.

The bridge restoration proposal was not popular with everyone and a minority tried to thwart the project with a “not in my back yard” philosophy.

The 130-year-old road access (The Satank Road) around which the private school was built, has been protected under Historic Right of Way Access RS 2477. Now a pedestrian route, this road leads directly to the Satank Bridge. This access was fought for. The trails have seen a 35%

increase in traffic since the Covid-19 threat as people seek fresh air and exercise.

The Rio Grande Trail access is protected by the Roaring Fork Transit Authority right of way (ROW). RFTA had earlier purchased the property around this section of the trail and the bridge. The landowner of the adjacent property downstream claims ownership of this land and for four years, blocked much needed improved public access to the river. RFTA has spent countless hours and taxpayer dollars to defend the public ROW and access at this location. After years of trying to work with the new neighbor, RFTA has obtained a court injunction defending their ownership and ordering the owner not to interfere with RFTA or the public’s use of the property.

Even after the judge’s decision, the woman continues to harass the public claiming ownership of the access point.

In a meeting with Commissioner Martin on the Satank Bridge, he pointed out that Garfield County also holds a 130 year old road ROW for property adjacent to the bridge including the river access. Martin said he is committed to protecting and improving the public’s access to the area. The commissioner instructed CVEPA to ask the public to write letters asking him to move forward with the long overdue improvements blocked by the neighboring landowner.

If we do not defend our public access, we will have no one to blame but ourselves when our families have nowhere to hike, to bike, fish or to swim in a mountain stream. Please contact Commissioner Martin and RFTA CEO Blankenship with the following letter or your own comments.

“Dear County Commissioner John Martin and RFTA CEO Dan Blankenship,

I am writing to ask you to move forward with the protection and improvement of river access at the historic Satank Bridge on the Roaring Fork River. It is not acceptable that one private landowner can block completion of a safe river access point while harassing the public’s peaceful enjoyment of this area. The adjacent landowner has blocked improvement of this access for four years while defying court orders to desist.

Please advance this project and safeguard our public access of the Satank Bridge and Rio Grande Trail corridor this summer.

Thank you, respectfully”

Addresses:

jmartin@garfield-county.com

County Commissioner

108 8th St Suite 101, Glenwood Spgs, CO 81601

dblankenship@rfta.com

RFTA CEO

2307 Wulfsohn Rd. ,Glenwood Spgs, CO 81601

—John Armstrong

Well-Deserved Thanks



CVEPA owes a huge debt of gratitude to long-time board member, Peter Westcott. Peter produced, edited and printed the “Crystal Clear” for over 30 years. His commitment to providing a loud and articulate voice for this organization has kept folks in the Crystal and Roaring Fork valleys—and beyond—informed of the many critical issues we face. His love of this valley and desire to protect it are also shown through his long tenure on our board, and as a CVEPA representative with other agencies. Lucky for us, Peter will continue to contribute his passion and skills to CVEPA as a board member.

It will be an uphill climb to reach Peter’s standards, but Suzy Meredith-Orr has put on those very big hiking shoes. Please contact her at smeredithorr@outlook.com with questions or suggestions on how we can improve the “Crystal Clear.”

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