



the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM BELWIN CONSERVANCY

FALL 2021/WINTER 2022



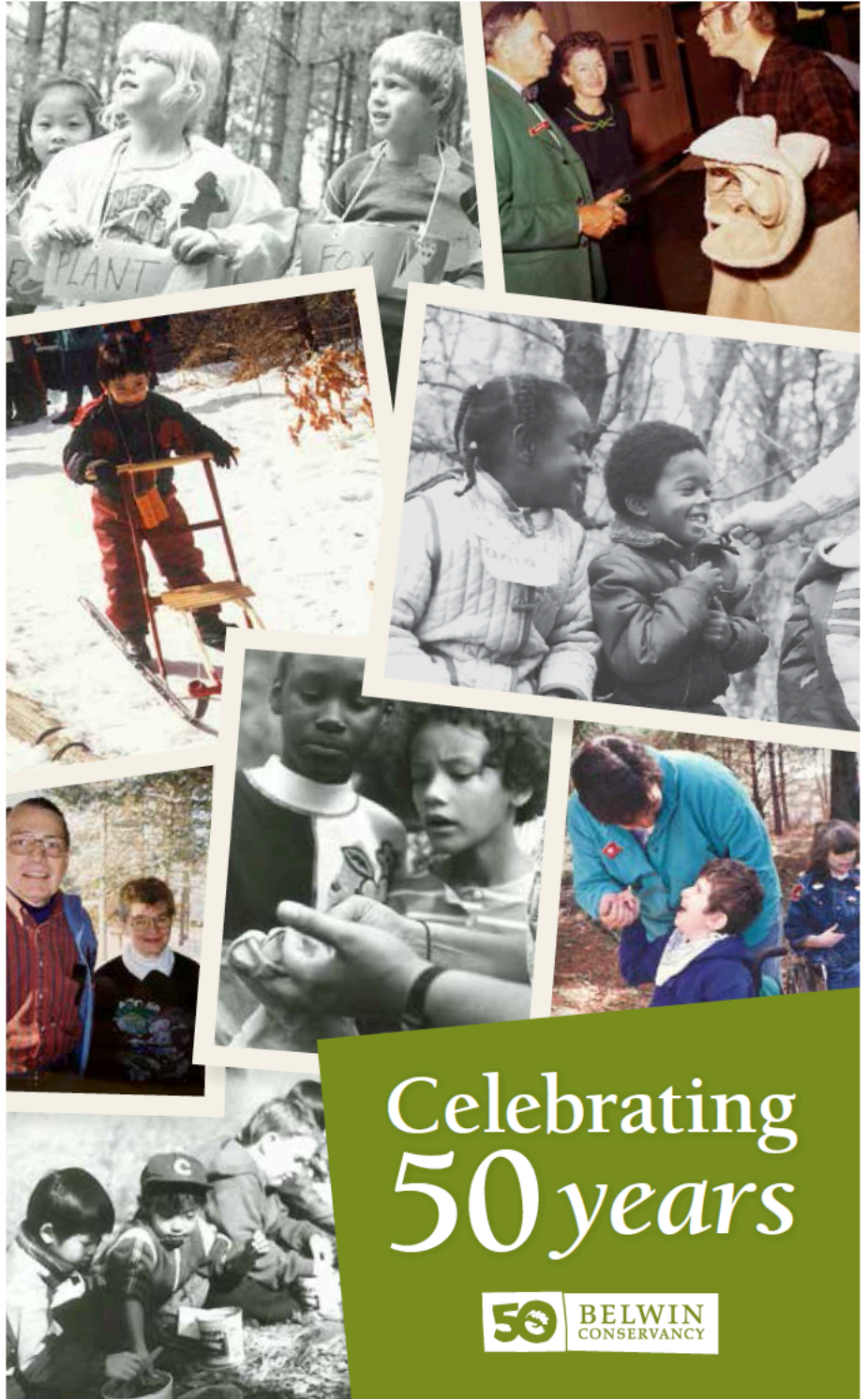
FUN FACT: ELASTIC BIRD BRAINS!

Each fall, chickadees cache hundreds of seeds to help them survive the cold weather. How do they remember where each seed is hidden? Elastic bird brains! The number of neurons in a chickadee's hippocampus (the remembering part of the brain) increases by 30 percent seasonally. When spring arrives and there's no need to remember those hiding places, their brain decreases in cellular count.

The Land We Are On

The land on which Belwin Conservancy exists is the ancestral home of the Wahpekute Dakota people, original stewards of this region. We recognize that despite government efforts to exterminate and diminish the Dakota, their connection to this land, water, history and lifeways perseveres today. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

To read more, visit belwin.org/the-land-we-are-on/



Celebrating 50 years





Inspiring Connections for 50 years... and Beyond!

FIFTY YEARS AGO, our founders, Charlie Bell and Lucy Winton Bell, wanted people to experience the prairie, forest, and stream, to immerse themselves in the wilderness. They found a partner in Saint Paul Public Schools and created an organization with the singular focus of providing opportunities for kids in the city to experience wild places.

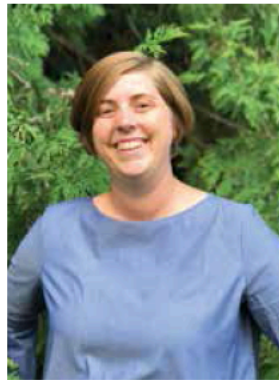
The importance of getting kids outside was apparent in 1971, just as it is today. We knew then about inequalities in access to nature, and today those disparities are even more pronounced. The need has grown.

Belwin's mission is to inspire connection and engagement with the natural world. I find myself thinking about what that means for the next 50 years. What will the future bring for our education programs? How can we expand access to the land while maintaining the integrity of the habitat? How do we invite our community to feel a sense of stewardship and deep connection to the land, the wildlife, and to Belwin? What challenges will arise, grow, or diminish?

We can say one thing for sure; a connection to nature is an existential need. We will keep filling that need by improving and expanding our education programs and community access.

We're continuing our commitment to Saint Paul Public Schools and launching a new partnership with Anishinabe Academy. We're growing our Arts, Culture, and Ecology program and preparing to open new trails in future years. And we're investing in capacity-building at Belwin to be ready for current and future opportunities.

I'm proud to be a part of an organization that is committed to the conservation of our wild places, and to be expanding the availability and accessibility so all can benefit from them. I'm glad that you are a part of the Belwin story too.



Katie Bloome

Katie Bloome
Executive Director, Belwin Conservancy
katie.bloome@belwin.org
Direct: 651-435-0848

SPOTTED IN THE WILD



Erin Thompson, 2019 McKnight Dance Fellow, with Caitlin Hammel, videographer, filming at Belwin's Creative Center last summer. Together with choreographer Bebe Miller, they created Erin's piece, "Reckless, blooming" for *SOLO: Six World Premiere Dance Films*.

Singer/songwriter Faith Boblett and guitarist Seth Duin performed at Belwin this summer for "Minnesota Sessions," a video series presented by 89.3 The Current. The film series is designed to showcase local musicians performing in some of our state's best hidden natural gems. Watch the video on The Current's Facebook page.





Creating Safe Havens for Birds

By Kate Seitz, Belwin Conservancy
Communications Partner

IF YOU'VE BEEN ON THE GROUNDS near the Education Center in the past year, you may have noticed a greater variety of birds. Rose-breasted grosbeaks, pileated woodpeckers, orioles, hummingbirds and other species are enjoying a resurgence thanks to staff and volunteers who installed a bird sanctuary over the past two years.

Work on the sanctuary began in the spring of 2019 on an area outside the Education Center's main classroom. The location was a favorite spot of Kurt Peters, a beloved



Paloma Cardoza and May Vang helped install temporary deer fencing around the bird sanctuary to protect the native plant species planted to attract birds.

Belwin Outdoor Science educator who passed away in November 2018.

Kurt was passionate about caring for birds at Belwin, says Lynette Anderson, Belwin Interpretive Naturalist and Restoration Specialist. "Kurt loved all aspects of the natural world and he loved teaching about birds," Anderson says. "It was a thrill to watch him teaching."

The sanctuary was funded through generous gifts made in Kurt's memory and several grants. Staff and volunteers cleared invasive species from the land on the side of the Education Center, then planted it with native species such as chokeberry and red cedar, Black-eyed Susan and spotted mint.

By the summer of 2021, native plants at the sanctuary had taken hold and the area was flush with pollinators.

In the center was a clean, full bird bath — something that Kurt took pride in caring for daily when he was alive.

Eco Patches

A bird sanctuary alone isn't enough to attract birds and keep them at the Education Center. Creating a corridor for them to travel safely through the understory is key. That's where Eco Patches come in.

As we remove the aging red pine forest near the Education Center, we are restoring the area with 10-foot by 10-foot sections of land. Each sponsored area features ecologically appropriate species such as eastern white pine and bur oak, bloodroot and wild ginger, wood sedge and wild rye.

If you're interested in sponsoring an Eco Patch, visit belwin.org/donate or text "Ecopatch" to 44-321.

Contributors and sponsors of the bird sanctuary and Eco Patches include: Friends of Kurt Peters, Saint Paul Garden Club, Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, Belwin Outdoor Science, and other supporters of Belwin Conservancy.



Bird Ambassadors

Many students who attend Belwin Outdoor Science through our partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools have had little or no experience in a natural landscape. As a result, the same pristine landscape that calms and inspires some can produce anxiety in others.

Natural "ambassadors" like birds have the ability to dispel a child's unease, inspiring curiosity that can lead to a lasting connection to nature. Upon observing a bird at Belwin students become quiet, curious, and still. After a few moments of observation, they erupt in questions, their worries forgotten, and are able to learn about what they have just seen. Contributors to Belwin are keeping the wilderness wild, allowing children to experience the wonders of the natural world, and giving so many the chance to connect with nature. We are truly grateful!





An Experience that Lasts a Lifetime

THE FIRST STUDENTS TO ATTEND BELWIN OUTDOOR EDUCATION LABORATORY ARRIVED IN NOVEMBER 1971. While the program has changed over time, the impact on those attending has remained consistent — and significant.

We wondered, why does a trip to Belwin mean so much to students 10, 20 or even 40 years later?

For sisters Laura Krenz and Denise Raverty, who grew up on the east side of St. Paul, their visits to Belwin in the late 1970s were magical forays into cool streams and quiet woods. “The highlight of our summers was the few weeks we had summer classes at Belwin,” says Krenz. “We learned about nature but also

photography, developing our own photos, French, and had a magic class!”

Last June, Laura and Denise returned to Belwin for a bird class. “We really enjoyed the class and it was a treat to be at Belwin again,” says Krenz. “I was very impressed with all of the improvements at Belwin but also with how much has stayed the same. Belwin is a magical place and instilled a love for nature and being aware of individual responsibility for the environment.”



Building a legacy

In the late 1960s, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) was looking for a site that could host outdoor education for students in the district. Charles Bell and Lucy Winton Bell formed a partnership with SPPS to help address that need. The Bells ensured the program’s success by donating 225 acres of land to the

program and constructing, at no cost to the school district, the 5,000-square-foot Belwin Outdoor Educational Lab (now the Belwin Education Center).

Today, Belwin maintains the Education Center and its surrounding grounds; SPPS designs and delivers the curriculum through its trained staff, and provides student transportation to and from the property.

For 13 years, Marty Davis has been Saint Paul Public Schools’ supervisor for preK-12 science, overseeing the Belwin Outdoor Science (BOS) program. Davis says that the program is a success because of how it has evolved.

“Belwin started as a program where kids learned about how to live outdoors,” Davis continues. “As state science standards came in and as academics became

more prominent in education across the U.S., we switched Belwin’s focus to utilizing the outdoors to teach science. So learning how to snowshoe became learning how to snowshoe in order to get to a position where you can look at a woodpecker hole and start to identify what kind of animal would do that.”

“Research shows that getting kids outside really helps engage them in learning overall. Belwin is obviously a great way to do that,” Davis continues.

Belwin wasn’t the only nature center to spring out of the 1970s environmental movement. Locally, Warner Nature Center, Dodge Nature Center and Carpenter Nature Center launched outdoor youth programs. A key difference, however, is that the trip to Belwin is written into the SPPS science curriculum, with every third and fifth grader attending the program.



Creating lasting impressions

Belwin Outdoor Science was an idea ahead of its time. It foreshadowed the importance of environmental education for young learners, and provided an opportunity for many Saint Paul children to realize their first experience of nature beyond the city.

In 1975, the partners decided to expand the program in a groundbreaking way. They installed a portable classroom and ADA trails along Valley Creek, launching



Investing in the future

To date, more than 600,000 children have participated in the Belwin Outdoor Science program and, each year, more than 10,000 SPPS students are served by the program in single-day, science-focused field investigations.

These attendance levels have remained relatively steady for decades, a testament to our partnership with SPPS and other regional districts. They are also, however, testing the limits of Belwin's existing facilities, which are booked to capacity every school year.

"Our vision for the future of Belwin Outdoor Science is to maintain and expand it," Davis says. "The program we have is the program we need. And we have some great technology tools now. With those, we can do much more to bring Belwin to students in their classrooms

Belwin's adapted outdoor education program. This first-of-its-kind program continues today and serves children with profound physical, cognitive, and emotional needs.

"This is a special place for students," says Cathy Smith, BOS teacher on special assignment. "Many of the [special education] students I work with have been able to come to Belwin over the years as elementary students, middle schoolers, and high school students."

Many of the students who participate in the BOS program take their experience beyond the classroom, sometimes into adulthood.

Gabe Horner, a biologist from Saint Paul, credits her time as a student at Belwin for launching a career in environmentalism.

"At Belwin, for the first time in my life, I looked at pond water under a microscope and saw things that I couldn't see with my own eyes," Horner says. "Once I saw pond water, I wanted to devote myself to doing something to protect nature. I saw how complex, wild and mysterious it was, and it just changed my life. It really put me on the path to wanting to conserve nature."



before and after they visit. That pre- and post-work has been there but we're working next on having Belwin staff do that with students via virtual learning."

In the coming years, Belwin is committed to investing in facilities that give even more kids the chance to engage with the natural world.

Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage

STARTING THIS FALL, students, teachers, and families from Anishinabe Academy, a Minneapolis public school, will regularly visit Belwin as part of a new partnership called "Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage: Conservation Through Indigenous Culture." We have dedicated 17 acres of land along Valley Creek for the school.

"By linking natural resource management, cultural heritage, and environmental education, we aim to restore an ecologically significant area of land, spark generations of stewardship, and support restoration of Indigenous culture," says Katie Bloome, Belwin's executive director.

Field trips to Belwin will be led by Native Elders and ecological experts. The land will be home to a garden where the school will cultivate Indigenous food and medicine. Parts of the parcel will also be restored with Indigenous knowledge included at every step from planning to planting.

"Many urban Indigenous communities have lost connections to nature and their food heritage. This program will restore land and assist in the recovery of our community's access and connections," says Cece Benimon of Anishinabe Academy.

The project has received funding for the first two years from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.

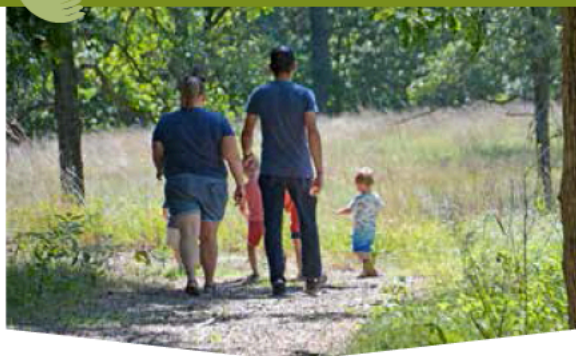
GEARED UP FOR SUCCESS

BOS ensures that every child who attends has the right clothing to be comfortable learning outdoors.



On any given day, that gear includes:

- 75 pairs of snowpants
- 125 pairs of winter boots
- 100 rain ponchos



Open Saturdays Are Becoming Open Weekends!

Every Saturday and Sunday, mid-April through mid-November, we are opening the trails at the Education Center (1553 Stagecoach Trail S.) for hiking. During the week, this area is reserved for use by Belwin Outdoor Science. Now, from dawn to dusk on the weekends, explore 4-plus miles of trails along Valley Creek and through pine forests, oak savanna and wetlands.

Formerly Third Saturdays and Summer Saturdays, we are excited to offer more access to this popular area. Start your hike via a new trailhead near the Belwin Conservancy main office.

Visit belwin.org/visit/#education for more information

Always Free And Open

Belwin Conservancy has more than 7 miles of hiking trails that are free and open to the public from dawn to dusk, 365 days/year.

Stagecoach Prairie features 4.5 miles of trails great for bird watching. Dogs must be on leash. Park at 825 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton.

The 2.5 miles of trails at **Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields** are teeming with life. A labyrinth is located in the northeastern section. Dogs must be on leash. Park at 15551 Division St., Afton.

You Made Happy Trails a Big Success!

Thanks to 92 generous donors, we raised over \$35,000 this summer for our public trail system. You helped us exceed our goal by \$5,000! In August, those donations were used to purchase a new mower. This fall, we will purchase a new ATV and apply any remainder to continued trail expansion and maintenance.

You played a key part in keeping our trails accessible and ready to welcome even more people to Belwin in the years to come. Happy trails!

Major Events

WINTER SOLSTICE BONFIRE

Monday, December 20, 2021

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Join us at a new location for this year's Solstice Bonfire! We'll have a warming tent, hot cider and cookies, night hikes, and more. Plus, Ikidowin Youth Theater storytellers will perform at 7:00 p.m. **NEW LOCATION:** *Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Road N., Lakeland, MN 55082. \$10 per car.*

MIDWINTER FAMILY FUN

Saturday, February 5, 2022

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

View the stars and moon with Minnesota Astronomical Society members, meet a raptor from Carpenter Nature Center, and enjoy arts/ecological activities and a campfire with s'mores. *Education Center and Joseph J. Casby Observatory, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton, MN 55001. \$10 per car.*



BELWIN BISON FESTIVAL

Saturday, May 21, 2022

9:00 a.m. Run with the Bison

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Festival

Fun activities for all ages. 5k Run with the Bison, live music, eco-arts, food trucks, and the bison release. *Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Road N., Lakeland, MN 55082. \$10 per car.*

Upcoming Events

October 9	50th Celebration Open House
December 4	Hiking into the Night
December 17 & 18	Women Walking
January 8	Hiking into the Night
February 5	Hiking into the Night
March 18 & 19	Women Walking
April 26	Spring Frog Walk

Please check our website for the latest COVID safety guidelines and a complete list of upcoming events: belwin.org/events



Many Hands, Many Generations Make Light Work

By Kate Seitz, Belwin Conservancy Communications Partner

LAST SPRING, a group of volunteers gathered at the Belwin Education Center to work on a new bird sanctuary (see article, page 3). More than plants, however, began to grow. From that day in May, a devoted group of volunteers became known as the Workaday Wednesday crew.

Every week over the summer, the group spent two hours on a land management project. Belwin Interpretive Naturalist / Restoration Specialist Lynette Anderson set the challenge each week and the volunteers



delivered. Whether it was hand-pulling invasive species or planting shrubs, they didn't shy away from the work.

The results of their efforts were quickly realized. "Every Wednesday that we get together, there are a minimum of eight volunteers," Anderson says. "If ten people volunteer, that's 20 hours, or half of a full-time work week, that we get done in just two hours!"

"These volunteers are not only doing an integral job, they are consistent in their integrity to do a good job and they are just saving us a lot of time," Anderson continued.

Belwin Conservancy Volunteer Coordinator Connie Hess attributes Lynette's educational approach as one of the reasons the weekly sessions have been such a success.

"Our little band of 'worker bees' look forward to doing whatever Lynette needs us to do each week," Hess says. "Lynette is great at explaining the reason why we're doing the work and how it helps the land. This, in my opinion, is part of the success story. Lynette makes us feel like our work is really important to the betterment of Belwin."

The Workaday Wednesday group includes children and young adults as well as adults and older adults.



"The merging together of different age groups has been a joy to watch," Hess says. "The 'youngsters' have gained confidence in their abilities and provide a boost of energy to the 'older' set. There's lots of laughter and fun along with being a productive crew."

Anderson agrees. "The camaraderie-building has been really fun to watch." An added bonus, she says, is how the younger volunteers see the commitment of their elders in terms of giving back to the natural world. "Seeing that dedication helps to establish an ecological sensitivity and commitment in the younger kids."

We always welcome new faces! If you want to volunteer, please complete the interest form at belwin.org.

Belwin Conservancy Board of Directors

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- Doug Johnson, Vice President
- Jill Koosmann, Treasurer
- John Satorius, Secretary
- Jerry Allan
- Cindy Gehrig
- Kris Hansen
- Jessica Manivasager
- Irene Qualters

New Trail Markers at Belwin

This year, thanks to our generous friends at Royal Credit Union, Belwin's public areas will be outfitted with trail markers to help guests navigate our growing network of hiking trails. We are thrilled that this long-requested upgrade is finally happening.

Thanks, Royal Credit Union!





BELWIN CONSERVANCY

1553 Stagecoach Trail South
Afton, Minnesota 55001-9703
P: (651) 436-5189 F: (651) 436-2899
belwin.org

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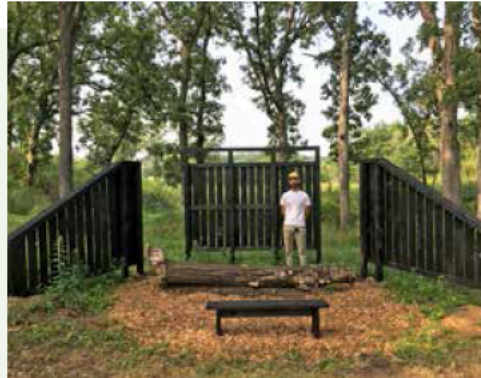
Inspiring through Nature

The mission of Belwin Conservancy is inspiring connection and engagement with the natural world.

2021 Artist in Residence

BELWIN CONSERVANCY'S 2021 ARTIST IN RESIDENCE IS TOM BIERLEIN, a Minneapolis-based sculptor, builder, and gardener. For his Belwin residency, Tom created a living sculpture titled "The Coming Soil" at Belwin's Creative Center.

"The Coming Soil' offers space to witness the simultaneous decomposition and regenerative properties of a fallen tree," Bierlein says. "Three *shou sugi ban* cedar walls accentuate the architecture of surrounding oak trees. Within this interior, the fallen aspen tree is a new ecosystem unto itself. Insects, lichen, and fungi all take their part in returning the tree back to the soil."



Watch for future events at the Creative Center for your chance to see Tom's sculpture.

For information, visit belwin.org/visit/arts-ecology/

Events related to Tom's residency are made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

TO THE
give MAX
Nov. 18, 2021

Give to the Max 2021

Belwin relies on your support to keep our restored habitats healthy and give everyone access to nature in all its splendor. Give to the Max Day is your chance to have a big impact on our work.

An anonymous donor will match all gifts made from November 1 to 18, 2021. Join, renew, or give an additional gift and see your dollars doubled!

belwin.org/donate



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BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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