

Save Coquille Valley farmland

From Sarah Crawford to 2 recipients 6 hours ago

My name is Sarah Crawford and I live in Coos County and work on a Community Farm on Garden Valley Rd. Garden Valley Rd. is adjacent to Winter Lake near Coquille, Oregon. My husband and I and two other families began farming this shared land in 2010 to offset our food costs and provide food to families like ours as well as local food banks and shelters. We started our farm project as a way to survive unemployment and provide local food to families who need it most but may not be able to afford it.

Each year we have increased the size of harvests as we have built a permaculture garden which balances our needs with those of animals, insects and water sources, which are abundant in and around Garden Valley. Our garden area has been a community farm since the 1970's and was used as a family farm prior to that since 1928. The soil and water are superb and ideal for growing all vegetables with minimal fertilizer and we do not spray, using permaculture techniques of water conservation, green manures and mulch cover to enhance our soil and production.

This past summer we had visitors on Garden Valley rd. who attempted to gain access to our field without our permission or knowledge to get our elevation level. They were confronted and asked what they were doing. It turned out that they were dispatched by the Beaver Slough Drainage District, The Nature Conservancy and Nehalem Marine (we found out much later who these groups were) to gather elevation data on Garden Valley rd. for a project the technicians called, 'the Winter Lake flooding project.'

We had never heard there was such project in the works, and as the name implies, Winter Lake is already under water all winter - October to April. We had been working our land for a full 2 years by then and had never heard from any of the involved parties, no letters, nothing. We did not know who was involved for 2 months despite public pleas for information through the local newspaper and local tv broadcast (archived on www.theworldlink.com and www.kcby.com respectively.) We were finally aware in late August that Beaver Slough Drainage District was approached by Nature Conservancy years before to find a way to pay for the BSDD failing tide gates which hadn't been maintained, yet they may be able to have them replaced by allowing the flooding of a portion of the drainage district.

This is where the story gets confusing. The drainage district is mandated by law to maintain drainage. Allowing the flooding of prime agricultural land in Winter Lake violates their by-laws and ORS 547, which governs drainage districts. We could not fathom how they could just violate their mandate and tax base and flood land, let alone flood land of unwilling neighbors who had paid into the drainage district for as many as 40 years. These neighbors were also not given notice, just like us, and were not given ANY info about this project until quite far along in the planning process. We were not told officially as I recalled to you and we found out by accident. We believe these groups, Beaver Slough Drainage District, the Nature Conservancy and eventually Oregon Water Enhancement Board never intended to share info with us until we found out this last summer and stood up for ourselves and the neighbors. These groups were not listening to us until we made their project public in August through the local media.

Our concerns with this project are many: loss of prime agricultural land, no information available (hydrology reports, geotechnical reports, tide gate design, initial proposals) negligence to the tax base of a drainage district, flooding in a drainage district violating law, monopolization of the drainage district board by the largest landowners, Fred Messerle (an interim county commissioner defeated in the last election but in that capacity when we found out about the project), the China Camp Gun Club and Mark Isenhardt, and Bandon Biota who can essentially out vote all the other members combined, as votes are determined by acreage, sitting supervisors appoint new ones and all the other members combined do not have the acreage to outvote the supervisors. This situation alone seems extremely unethical and biased.

That situation is so harmful to us neighbors but there is more. We also learned in August (the technicians came by in late June) that the Winter Lake flooding would include the bottom 10 acres of Garden Valley rd. pasture also because the grant money was contingent on the 'restoration of China Creek.' This part has never made sense as China Creek historically drains Southwest to the Coquille River through the Waterman Ranch property and the drainage district is prohibited by law from flooding any land in the district as the three properties on Lower Garden Valley rd. are a part of (our land is sixth up the valley and was never annexed by BSDD - they may have tried to flood all the way if we had been.) We were told in October that they could basically do whatever they wanted as they had all the votes and we could do nothing. As you can imagine my husband and I were sick over this mismanagement and lawbreaking.

This brings us to the next aspect of this confusing project. The ODFW became the beneficiary of a land trade between themselves and Bandon Biota to acquire the almost 500 acres right in the middle of Winter Lake. In return Bandon Biota would acquire timberland on the east shore of Eel Lake in Lakeside, a pristine deep water lake with 80 year old marketable timber adjacent to Oregon State Parks land. We are very concerned with this portion of the whole project for many reasons also. Will they clear cut next to a pristine dune lake? Why does Bandon Biota want this acreage? ODFW had a commission meeting in Portland which made it very hard for us who live in Coos County to attend and give a voice against this project. We sent letters against the land trade en masse, but the commission still voted to proceed with the land trade as they published it was, 'in the public's best interest' to do so. I guess the public does not include the farmers in Coquille, or the swimmers and boaters of Eel lake.

Now ODFW has this land, they plan to construct a multi- million dollar swamp, tide gates are on the back burner and not

the focus of ODFW or the Nature Conservancy or OWEB at this time and the BSDD declined to meet at all in January, which I cannot believe a public entity can elect to do. The amount of money OWEB intends to grant for this swamp which could potentially flood out all the neighbors is offensive. We are hard working people with modest incomes and we work very hard just to make ends meet. These groups are not working in a realm of reality or with what Coos County or Winter Lake truly needs or is seasonally like. Spending several million to potentially flood everyone out makes no sense, these groups have not researched the validity of their proposals, have not given information up front or when asked for it adequately and they seem to be working the laws as they see fit.

We want the chance to work and live justly and use our land to farm in perpetuity. We want to see the neighbors at ease and the tax base the district is ethically bound to represent be represented fairly. We want to see ODFW conduct actual onsite research for many years to learn the ecology of Winter Lake before they change it irreversibly. China Camp Creek does not need rerouting as it flows southwest to the river and not uphill, the way the ever-changing proposal reads at this time, mostly we want these partners to tell the truth. We want the pristine condition of Eel lake upheld and no clear cutting to be allowed. Most of all we want these farmers of Winter Lake area and residents of Garden Valley Rd. have recourse in case these flooding groups cause damage to the valuable pasture land or private property of Coquille Valley or other agricultural land in Coos County or all of Oregon. We want our rights to matter.

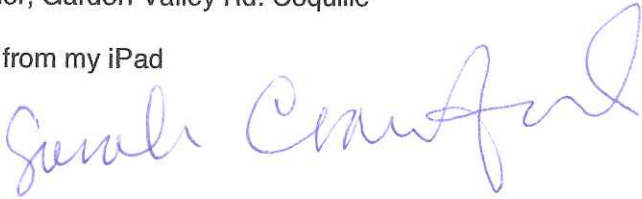
Thank you for your assistance in this matter and I look forward to a positive result.

Respectively,

Sarah Crawford

Farmer, Garden Valley Rd. Coquille

Sent from my iPad



The World

Help oppose Coquille's flooding proposal

AUGUST 04, 2012 7:00 AM

I am concerned about the Coquille Valley Inundation Project proposed and endorsed by agencies of the state of Oregon (ODFW, OWEB); a Coos County commissioner; USFW; conservation groups Bandon Biota and Nature Conservancy; and several landowners who will directly benefit from the flooding by swapping or selling their land to the USFW.

I lease property owned by Gladys George Trust on Garden Valley Road outside Coquille. (Map # 27 S 1327-A0-00600). Our lease runs through 2014, and we have first option to lease again until 2019.

We farm this land as a community farm. Anyone who wants to grow their own food and work hard is welcome to apply. We have three other farmers with their own spaces on the land. The production capability of my own area is huge, and we have provided 40 harvests over the last eight weeks to approximately 25 people.

We have improved our infrastructure with fences, water tank, plastic mulch, perennial plants, orchard trees, mowing tools and eliminating canary grass over three years. We farm this land, without spraying chemicals, to feed our family and the others who signed up with us as a community-supported agriculture project. We also participate in local farmer's markets and sell to local restaurants, in season, in order to make ends meet for our family of 6.

We are able to water our 14,000-square-foot fenced, permaculture biodynamic farm with our rights to China Creek water, and the water level is quite near the surface in our field already. Permanent flooding of Winter Lake and lower Garden Valley Road would eliminate our driveway and ability to cross our field and grow food all year.

We appreciate that the Coquille Valley has great soil for growing food, as history of the area has documented numerous times. Any change to the drainage of China Creek will affect our property's drainage.

We need assistance to navigate the legalities of opposing this proposed year-round flooding of Winter Lake and our adjacent farmland. Flooding would negate years of work and long-term plans to be self-sufficient. Please help us find solutions that will not ruin our farm and others who may lose so much if their land is flooded.

Thank you for considering our situation. Please help secure our future interests and gain full transparency of this project.

Sarah Crawford

Coquille

Winter Lake loss is already here

Letter to The Editor

SEPTEMBER 13, 2012 11:00 AM

My family is losing economically already because of the Winter Lake flooding proposal. Time I have put into standing up to this corporate mitigation plan has cost me precious moments I should have been replanting for fall. I have a box of seed packets that should have been planted to prove it. Being investigated by Wild Rivers Alliance was one meeting that interrupted planting in August.

I have found that arrogance and compromised ethics are at the root of the Winter Lake or 'Summer Lake' fiasco. County officials who have been appointed are pledging their votes and influence to corporate greed. I will lose vital crop tonnage, and my family and others will get less food this season as a result of my dedicating time to fight this underhanded ploy to gain profits, timberland and mitigation.

I have little spare time, and attending town hall meetings, calling county counsels, state ethics committees and the governor's office citizens' representatives has shown me that we are going to be hit hard if we don't stand up now and fight for our right to make a living.

The loss of food production will be a big economic blow. We are barely making it paycheck to paycheck, and farming in our spare time offsets food costs. I have been counting the time lost fighting this ill-conceived project since late July and it has compounded through August as more people found out and wanted to come see what we are doing, which we welcome; vital, yet time-consuming.

Not only will this project flood Winter Lake all summer and push water over train tracks, under the highway and into the fields of Garden Valley Rd. property owners, it stands to impact the drinking water of Eel lake if timber is traded for Winter Lake pasture and clear-cut at the expense of the swimmers, fishermen and people of Lakeside who drink that water.

Economic losses have begun. They are real and any local business trying to succeed should be wary of this type of pandering to corporate greed happening in Coos County. I implore all people involved to see this project for what it is already doing to us. We will lose economic stability and they have not even begun bulldozing in the name of 'restoration.' Our farm is a wetland -- no restoration needed. There is great loss in our future if this plan proceeds.

**Sarah Crawford
Coos Bay**

Fish and Wildlife Commission
3406 Cherry Avenue NE
Salem, Oregon 97303-4924

Commission:

I wish to go on record against the proposed "Eel Lake/Coquille Valley Land Exchange." I have been a resident of Coos Bay since 1968, and I have been active on the water, both in my 15 foot wooden peapod and as an active open water Masters Swimmer. I have used Eel Lake extensively for both activities, and I am afraid that the proposed project will severely degrade the water quality in Eel Lake and actually is unnecessary.

I do not object to the replacement of tide gates at the Winter Lake site. I do object to the method of financing them. This proposal is also not supported by investigations by ODFW staff on actual water and salmonid quality issues. It is based upon the wishes of the Beaver Slough Drainage District to have someone else pay for the tide gate replacement and a plan to log one of the last deep water coastal lakes in Oregon.

The Commission should "disapprove the opportunity to complete the land exchange between Eel Lake lands and those in the Coquille Valley." There are other lands owned by Oregon that could be used (logged) to support the project. The Oregon land around Eel Lake should not be touched (logged) because it could severely impact the water quality of the lake, the source of water for the City of Lakeside, and impact users of the lake like myself who not only boat on the lake but swim in it regularly.

In addition the ODFW staff members involved in this project have not done basic research on the validity of the Winter Lake project. They do not know if the proposed "pond-in-a-pasture" will actual augment juvenile salmon populations. They do not know if there are fish now in the current Winter Lake. They do not know or have not investigated the impact of the proposed clear cutting on tourism at Eel Lake and Tugman State Park, one of the most popular parks in Oregon.

The local ODFW personnel need to do such research before any land swap takes place. I have augmented my position on these issues in the following pages.

The Commission should not "put the cart before the horse," by approving the land swap before such research takes place. And, if any land swap is proposed in the future, it should not involve any land around Eel Lake, thus despoiling one of the loveliest and still deep coastal lakes left in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Ralph Mohr
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Summary

The proposed land swap in the “Winter Lake” project should not occur. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (hereinafter ODFW) is violating its own Mission Statement (“Our mission is to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.”) by promoting and supporting this project. In addition the ODFW has not done any basic research to indicate that the land swap and the proposed Winter Lake proposal is practical and viable. Last, the project is against the wishes of landowners directly affected in the Coquille River valley and of citizens who use Eel Lake for recreation.

Winter Lake

The origins of the Winter Lake land swap deal are murky. Supposedly it came from Steve Denny, formerly an ODFW employee, now representing Nature Conservancy. He allegedly made a proposal to the Beaver Creek Drainage District as a plan to replace old and decrepit tide gates on what is called “Winter Lake,” an area off the lower Coquille River that is used in the summer for agriculture and grazing, and in the winter it fills with river water, becoming a safety valve for flooding on the Coquille River, what the area did all the time in pre-settlement days.

The problem is that the Beaver Slough Drainage District did not have enough money for the tide gates. To get that money it was proposed through the ODFW to make part of Winter Lake into a permanent pond to see if juvenile salmon could summer there in exchange for land around the East Arm of Eel Lake, a northern Coos County coastal lake, which would be clear-cut to finance the tide gates. The problem is that ODFW has done no research at all to see if this plan would work to enhance salmon population in the Coquille River system, and it ignored any consequences of the clear-cut on the aesthetics and current use of Eel Lake.

The ODFW proposes to trade 670 acres of forested shoreline of the East Arm of Eel Lake for 510 acres of pasture and wetland in the Coquille River Winter Lake area. The Eel Lake timber rights would remain with the ODFW, and any logging profits would be used to finance the tide gates and the establishment of a pond for supposed summer juvenile salmon protection in Winter Lake.

The merits of the “Coquille Wetlands Project,” as ODFW calls the proposal, were presented in several meetings on the Oregon coast. This writer attended two of them and recorded *verbatim* questions and comments about the Project.

When asked in a public meeting Nov. 13, 2012 in Coquille if there has been any preliminary research on the possible survivability of juvenile salmon in such a summer pond, ODFW spokespeople said, “No.” When asked if ODFW has studied how many juvenile salmon currently pass and then return through current tide gates, the answer was “No.” The ODFW spokesman then said, “We don’t monitor those numbers of fish.”

It must be asked, “Why not?” Why not check to see if juvenile salmon are currently in Winter Lake? Why not find out if there are juvenile salmon in the Coquille River during the summer in that area? If there are no fish there, currently, how does ODFW know fish will inhabit the proposed summer pond? Build it and they will come?

ODFW have done no studies to learn what the summer temperature of water in the summer pond might be. It is well known that optimum temperatures for rearing

salmonids are generally between 10° C and 16° C. (See Frissell in the Bibliography) The ODFW propose to make a shallow pond in an area where air temperatures are normally over 70 degrees F during the summer. It is quite possible that salmonids could not survive in such the proposed shallow pond, surrounded by pastureland. The ODFW does not know any of this information., as admitted by ODFW personnel in Coquille.

As several members of the audience said at the Coquille meeting, “You have no data. You have admitted as much.” “You don’t know how efficient the proposed tide gates might be.” “You folks don’t know what is going on now.” There is “no proof at this time” that the project will work.

The second ODFW presentation was to coastal loggers Nov. 16 after the Coquille meeting. What was significant at this meeting were two things: for the first time in any publication or meeting the ODFW admitted they would log Eel Lake to finance the tide gates. Before this nothing had been said publicly about clear cutting one of the last deep water lakes on the Oregon coast. This was a clear case, if not of chicanery on the part of ODFW, of a willful attempt to hide this fact from the public.

In addition the loggers, in the Question and Answer period after the presentation, were vehemently against the Coquille Wetlands Project as presented.

The loggers asked, “How will coho be helped when you give up land in Eel?” The ODFW ignored the concern about Eel Lake and answered by saying how the new tide gates will help salmon onto the pasture pond in the summer. The loggers responded, “You’re basing this whole thing on coho? The Coquille valley is more important the way it is now.”

The loggers questioned the need for tide gates at all. “What would be the risk of taking them out and not replacing them?” “There would be twice daily tidal flooding” was the ODFW answer. “Wouldn’t this be more beneficial for salmon?” ODFW answered, “If there were no tide gates, there would be an adverse effect on neighbors. We would have no control.”

When the ODFW official said the ODFW would not be in control, the loggers let out a long, spontaneous guffaw of sarcastic laughter. One said in an aside to another, “We’re familiar with governmental control.”

This response illustrates another fallacy of the Coquille Wetlands Project. In its meetings the ODFW supposedly listens to public comments. However, loggers who would benefit from the proposed clear cut of Eel Lake were not in favor of that. They hunt and fish the Winter Lake area and are deeply concerned that this project is not well thought out and in their opinion would not work.

A member of the Coquille meeting audience is also one of the five or so landowners in Winter Lake, and she was vitally against the project. She said, “Put a hold on things right now. You’ve got a lot of problems.” Another questioner was concerned with changing Winter Lake and transferring private land there to public land. “Once we lose it, we’ll never get it back.”

The loggers were also concerned about the land swap. One asked, “What business is it of the State to own property in the middle of Coquille Valley?”

Eel Lake

Eel Lake is the other side of the land swap. Eel Lake is still a "large, deep coastal lake" on the border of Douglas and Coos Counties. In the *Atlas of Oregon Lakes* Eel Lake is described as a mesotrophic lake, "due more to sunken logs rather than aquatic biota decomposition," unlike its neighbor, Ten Mile Lake, over the next ridge to the south. No one in Coos County wants Eel Lake to turn into another Ten Mile Lake.

Eel Lake has two arms, the west is part of Tugman State Park and the east is primarily owned by the State of Oregon. The proposed land swap would encompass Coos County land on both sides of the east arm up to the Douglas County line.

When asked at the Coquille meeting if the ODFW had studied the economic effect on tourists, kayakers, swimmers and fishermen at Tugman Park and Eel Lake if the hillsides on the East Arm were clear cut, ODFW answered, "No." When asked if ODFW had studied the problems that Eel Lake already has with turbulence and sediment from current logging at the lake on Douglas County land, the answer was "No."

There is a strong STEP contingent at Eel Lake, working hard to improve the fishing in the lake and make it a better producer of salmon and steelhead. Their project this year and next is to create gravel spawning beds in streams and creeks feeding Eel Lake. They have already encountered problems with sediment and debris from current logging in Douglas County on the peninsula between the arms of the lake.

Each year the Eel Lake STEP group puts on a fishing clinic in June for kids where they learn about fishing in general, how to tie appropriate knots for fishing, what habitat fish require, and what lures to use. The kids then go to a fish tank in the lake and catch two plump rainbows to take home. This year each kid received a brand new fishing rod from the STEP fishermen.

I happen to be a Masters swimmer who last year swam in Eel Lake 27 times for workouts. While swimming at Eel Lake I have noticed that it has become the pre-eminent kayak lake in Coos County. We swimmers are escorted by kayaks, canoes and other small craft on a regular basis. There is a constant flotilla of small craft on the lake throughout any week.

I can not help to think that a clear cut of the east arm of Eel Lake would be highly detrimental to the aesthetic and practical value of Eel Lake. Even though the ODFW talks about a 200 foot buffer between the clear cut and the shoreline, to me looking at clear cut hills is like looking at the tonsured head of a monk.

The scalping of the scenic ridgeline viewed from the boat ramp at Eel Lake would severely detract from the attractiveness of the lake for the many tourists who come to the adjacent Tugman Park Campground. For the past 9 years I have helped put on an Open Water Masters Swimming Meet at Eel, with swimmers coming from places like Bend, Portland, Medford, Utah and California. They all marvel at the scenic beauty of the place.

Last year "Oregon Field Guide" of Oregon PBS did a segment on our swim meet and Masters swimming. To see what the lake looks like now go to "Open Water Swimming" in the Bibliography.

If the proposed land swap between the Coquille Wetlands Project and Eel Lake occurs, this ambience as well as the water quality of Eel Lake will be compromised. There is already debris and sediment coming into the lake from logging. Clear cut lands are frankly ugly, especially when surrounding freshwater lakes. ODFW is more interested

in cutting trees than using them to preserve fish habitat, provide tourist money for local areas and protect drinking water for communities.

Summary

The proposed land swap between Eel Lake and Winter Lake should not take place. The original reason for making the swap is to provide for new tide gates to protect private property at Winter Lake. Either the current land owners should come up with the funds for such a project, or other land, not around any freshwater lake in Coos County, much less Eel Lake, should be considered for a land swap to finance the project.

ODFW has not proven a need for this project. ODFW has not done preliminary research in the Coquille River Valley to prove that their pond-in-a-pasture scheme could actually work. They do not know of the effect that new tide gates would have on juvenile salmon passing through them. They do not even know if there are juvenile salmon there. , “We don’t monitor those numbers of fish.”

In the report financed by the Nature Conservancy, “Analysis of the Economic Benefits of Salmon Restoration Efforts on the Lower Coquille River and Associated Economic Impacts,” the focus was on the entire Winter Lake Area, not just the land identified for the land swap. Any data from this report is suspect, therefore, and was entirely conjectural in the first place. The authors did not do actual measurements of fish stock in the Coquille River Valley any more than the ODFW did.

Large numbers of Coos County residents and property owners are against this project, including land owners within the Winter Lake area. Loggers, who would directly benefit from the clear cutting of Eel Lake, are against changing either area, Winter Lake or Eel Lake. This proposal has been called a “scam” in Letters to the Editor in a local newspaper.

The best advice was that given by a land owner within the Winter Lake area. “Put a hold on things right now.” There are many problems with this proposed land swap so it should not be concluded now. ODFW needs at least a year to do the research necessary to do the project right. They also need to find other timberland, not around Eel Lake, to complete the land swap, if that is still a viable option for Winter Lake after that year of research.

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The Winter Lake proposal by the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has turned out to be a tremendous scam that is based upon conjecture and can severely harm Eel Lake. You might ask why is Eel Lake affected by a project on the Coquille River. It is not simple.

It seems that this land exchange started when the Beaver Slough Drainage District, Fred Messerle, chairman, wanted to replace the tide gates that controlled water in and out of Winter Lake. The District started looking for money to do this. The Nature Conservancy proposed the land swap so no owner would have to pay for anything.

The ODFW proposes to trade 670 acres of forested shoreline of the East Arm of Eel Lake for 510 acres of pasture and wetland in the Coquille River Winter Lake area. The Eel Lake timber rights would remain with the ODFW, and any logging profits would be used to finance the tide gates and the establishment of a pond for supposed summer juvenile salmon protection in Winter Lake.

When asked in a public meeting in Coquille if there has been any preliminary research on the possible survivability of juvenile salmon in such a summer pond, ODFW spokespeople said, "No." When asked if ODFW has studied how many juvenile salmon currently pass and then return through current tide gates, the answer was "No."

When asked if the ODFW had studied the economic effect on tourists, kayakers, swimmers and fishermen at Tugman Park and Eel Lake if the hillsides on the East Arm were clear cut, they answered, "No." When asked if they had studied the problems that Eel Lake already has with turbulence and sediment from current logging at the lake, the answer was "No."

The ODFW have not done their homework. They want to have a land transfer for a project that may not work. They want to scalp the East Arm of Eel Lake of timber to pay for a summer pond and new and untested tide gates. The ODFW want to despoil the last deep coastal lake in Coos County that is also Lakeside's water supply.

Coos County does not need the Winter Lake project. Loggers, fishermen, other Winter Lake landowners and Eel Lake users don't want it. Only Fred Messerle, the Nature Conservancy and the ODFW want it.

Write to the Fish and Wildlife Commission, 3406 Cherry Avenue NE, Salem, OR 97303-4924 before Dec. 6 to oppose it.

Loggers at a recent meeting were most skeptical about the project. One logger said, "You're basing this whole thing on coho? Coquille Valley is more important the way it is now." The loggers said, "Take out the tide gates if you want more salmon." The ODFW said, "If there were no tide gates, it would have an adverse effect on neighbors. There would be no control." The last comment was greeted with loud and sarcastic laughter from the loggers.

When asked what would happen if the tide gates were taken out and not replaced, ODFW said, "If there were no tide gates, it would have an adverse effect on neighbors. There would be no control." The last comment was greeted with loud and sarcastic laughter from the loggers. They are very familiar with government control of their actions.

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