



**GRAND
PRAIRIE
FRIENDS**

thirty five
years of
land preservation
in east-central
Illinois

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

A BIG THANK YOU!



Jamie Ellis,
Board President

My involvement with Grand Prairie Friends goes back 25 years. In 1994 GPF hired me as the first summer stewardship intern. In 1999 I said yes to joining the Board of Directors, and in 2000, I stepped up to serve as president. Except for a brief respite in 2004, I have been president since then.

My how we've grown. I watched, nudged, participated, and led as we went from an all-volunteer group keen on helping steward local prairies to an organization with professional staff and over 1000 acres of prairie and forest natural areas under our protection and management. One thing that hasn't changed is the passion of our members and volunteers to conserve nature in east-central Illinois.

My time as president of Grand Prairie Friends has come to an end. Others on the Board of Directors are ready to step in to be president. With trust in staff to operate the organization, the Board can be more strategic in their role. I have confidence in our Board to provide the leadership needed to fulfill our conservation mission.

Peace and Joy to you this Holiday Season and All the Best in the New Year.



Sarah Livesay,
Executive Director

Congratulations Grand Prairie Friends' members, donors and family for accomplishing 35 years of land preservation. With over 1,200 acres now under GPF management, this is certainly a time to pause, reflect and celebrate. But not for too long—land conservation is a marathon not a sprint. As a land trust, we have committed to protect and preserve these spaces in perpetuity—and that is certainly a long time. This timeline requires deliberate and intentional conservation, finance and policy planning in the present, in order to be the effective organization we need to be in the future.

Over the course of the last year, the GPF Board of Directors has taken steps to establish sustainable fundraising programs including the establishment of the Blazing Star Society. The Board has updated policies and spent dedicated time plotting the course for future organization plans. Currently, they are engaged in the writing of a strategic conservation plan which provides a tool to prioritize acquisition and restoration decisions. We stand prepared to respond to the anticipated opportunities presented by the new Natural Areas Stewardship Act legislation, which is intended to provide land management funding to Illinois' land trusts. Most of all, I look forward to continuing this important work connecting people, land and communities.

YOU ARE



GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS



Jeff Peyton,
Natural Areas
Manager

When you work for an organization like Grand Prairie Friends, one thing you can be certain of is that your job is never boring! Each year that I have worked with Grand Prairie Friends has held new and exciting conservation projects, and 2019 is certainly no exception.

This year, we have continued an ongoing project of restoring hundreds of acres of former farmland into reforested habitat, planting tens of thousands of new trees, and, by enrolling land in conservation easements, ensuring that the newly-restored habitat will remain protected in perpetuity.

Conservation research continues to underscore the importance of connectivity – establishing large, contiguous habitat corridors that increase resiliency to climate change, non-native invasion and habitat degradation as well as facilitating movement of wildlife – and our recent restoration projects do just that.

At the same time, we continue to protect and manage the fragile, high-quality remnant prairies and savannas that Grand Prairie Friends was founded to preserve. Thank you, Grand Prairie Friends members, for making all of this possible!

GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS BOARD



Incoming:
Samantha Osborne
Samantha is an Assistant Professor of Graphic Design + Typography at Eastern Illinois University.

Welcome Samantha!



Outgoing: *Marissa Grant*
During my time on the board, I was very fortunate to work with such a dedicated board of directors who both taught and inspired me. I am very happy to be part of a group where the board of directors, staff, volunteers, and members of GPF have such dedication and passion towards our natural areas.

Thank you Marissa!

WE CELEBRATE YOU!

thirty five
years of
land preservation
in east-central
Illinois

It all began 35 years ago with the discovery of prairie along an old railroad line called Shortline.

Memories of those days from Wendy Garrison:

The year 1983 was one of crisis and opportunity. The word went out: Illinois Central was selling railroad rights-of-way.

Things began happening all at once. The environmental community in Champaign-Urbana knew that railroad

Things began happening all at once.

rights-of-way were refuges for original prairie remnants.

Some walked miles of local sections of track for sale. The mile that is now the Shortline Railroad Prairie was recognized as being rich in prairie plants and in a beautiful, quiet location.

A core team of about 7-12 people met at the dining table of Katie Hamrick and Lois Drury, two formidable women. They dreamed about the purpose, focus, goals, and vision of a new organization. We would own land in the Grand Prairie division and restore it!

And so was born the dream that has become a 35-year legacy of natural area preservation and restoration that is Grand Prairie Friends.

For that, we thank you, and celebrate your accomplishments!

These are just a few of the many leaders who have made a difference!



Sharon Monday Barrie & Shirley Hunt

Jamie Ellis



Beckie Green

Bob Reber

Dave Mott

Mary Kay Solecki



Early leaders at Fairchild Cemetery Savanna Nature Preserve

1984: Shortline
Prairie (6 acres)

1992: Bonnie's
Prairie Nature
Preserve
(10.5 Acres)

2000: Ems Site
(1.7 Acres)

2003 & 2005:
Fairchild Cemetery
Savanna Nature
Preserve (1.5 Acres)

2004: James
Nance Woods
(14 Acres)

2004 & 2007: Loda
Cemetery Prairie
Nature Preserve
(12.5 Acres)

PRESERVE

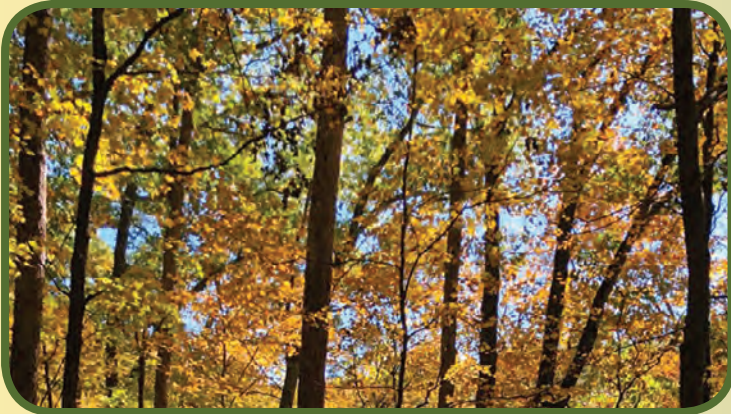
Owned: **1,061 ACRES** Managed: **1,145 ACRES**

PROTECTED IN PERPETUITY!

We successfully added TWO new Land and Water Reserves, registered with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). This adds 224 acres to our total now protected in perpetuity!

These two parcels can be visited at the Warbler Ridge Conservation Area:

- Warbler Bottoms North (92 acres)
- Warbler Landing (132 acres)



AWARDS

- *2019 Coles County Outstanding Conservationist*, from Coles County Soil & Water Conservation District
- *2019 Friend of Conservation, Honorable Mention*, from National Association of Conservation Districts

NATURAL AREAS CEMETERY TRAINING

We hosted a training on Natural Area Cemetery management with IDNR Archaeologist Dawn Cobb.

Since we manage five natural area cemeteries, this was a great opportunity to talk about co-managing cultural and natural resources.



12 headstones were reset at WRCA's pre-civil war cemetery

2012: Warbler Ridge Conservation Area (WRCA) begins with purchase of Embarras Ridges (141 Acres)

2014: Addition to WRCA: Warbler Woods Nature Preserve (193 Acres)

2014: Edna Edwards Burnett Land and Water Reserve (20 Acres)

2015: Addition to WRCA (293 Acres)

2017: Addition to WRCA (99 Acres)

2018: Addition to WRCA (274 Acres)



BLAZING STAR SOCIETY

GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS

Together, we protect the land we treasure today and forever. Members of the Blazing Star Society, our new giving club, ensure that the natural areas conservation work important to us all continues.

Members donate annual unrestricted gifts at \$1000 and above. They are invited to participate in special members-only outings and gatherings throughout the year, and are recognized in various publications.

Join others that share your passion! Contact Sarah Livesay, our Executive Director, for more information.



Blazing Star Society members are invited to special events and behind-the-scenes experiences like this evening social held at Dave & Dianda Easter's home in August!

Founding Members:

Karen & David Andsager
Clark & Irene Bullard
Beth Chato
Nancy Coutant
Fred & Nancy Delcomyn
Dave & Dianda Easter
Beverly & Dan Foote
Stan Herrin
Susan & Lew Hopkins
Phil Hult
Shirley Hunt
Gary & Dixie Jackson
Karen & Pat Kane
Keith Kohonzo
Pam Leiter
Sarah & Jeff Livesay
Kenton & Dorothy Macy

Dave & Chris Main
John & Diane Marlin
Robert McKim
Jenny & Kristi Mercer
Craig Milling & Carla Cáceres
Dirk Mol & Jerry Wray
Sharon Monday & Jack Paxton
Elizabeth & Milton Otto
Beverly & Tom Rauchfuss
Trent Shepard
Topper & Carol Steinman
Gloria Valenti
Michael Walker & Kristina Gunsalus
Diane & Ed Wilhite
Anonymous

FOUNDING MEMBERS!
32



YOU ARE



GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS

RESTORE



PLANTS SOLD AT PLANT SALE
5,000



E. PRAIRIE FRINGED ORCHID

YEARS CROSS-POLLINATING
28

8
BLOOMING

PRESCRIBED FIRE RESTORATION
88 ACRES



FOR PARKLAND COLLEGE
25
PRAIRIE PLANTS
RELOCATED



TREES PLANTED AT WRCA
24,000*

TREES PLANTED BY VOLUNTEERS
600

Thank you Living Lands and Waters!



*Matches the population of Charleston!

WARBLER RIDGE CONSERVATION AREA

Bat Monitoring

Volunteers were trained to monitor Warbler Ridge's bat population with evening roost counts this summer. Eight volunteers were out roost monitoring for 33 hours this summer. Most bats counted in one evening: 56!

HOURS MONITORING ROOSTS
33
HOURS

VOLUNTEER MONITORS
8
VOLUNTEERS



Helping Wounded Veterans

Healing of our American Heroes (HOOAH) was started to give back to soldiers who share a passion for hunting and fishing. According to founder Tom Huffington: "The outdoors are the perfect place to heal mentally and physically." In November & December, more than a dozen veterans will enjoy a long weekend of hunting and connecting at WRCA.



Illinois Recreational Access Program

For our first-ever deer archery season at Warbler Ridge, 18 permits were issued through the IL Recreational Access Program (IRAP) for first-time hunters and youth. IRAP is an Illinois DNR program aimed at connecting youth and families to land.



SEASONALS & INTERNS



Easily my favorite thing about working with GPF was learning the personality of our different sites from spring to fall; being present for the minutiae of seasonal changes gifted me perception and appreciation of plants that I would have overlooked before.
~Cecilia Boyd, Natural Resources & Operations Technician



The enriching experiences being a Grand Prairie Friends Intern sparked a fire for me to jump start my career saving natural areas throughout Illinois.
Thanks again!
~Cameron Ruyle, 2018 Intern (now Pheasants Forever Invasive Plant Strike Team staff)



I learned many things while interning at Grand Prairie Friends, but I think the most interesting would be plant identification. It's useful knowledge to have, and something that I will continue to use in future events/careers.
~Megan Lomas, 2019 Intern (now fulltime Environmental Educator at Douglas-Hart Nature Center)

VOLUNTEERS

The success of GPF depends on our volunteers to donate their time, talent, and treasure. What is your superpower to share?

2019 VOLUNTEER HOURS
OVER 985!



Diane Wilhite,
Volunteer Coord.
**2019 Governor's
Volunteer Service
Award for East-
central IL!**



Ryan Boske-Cox,
Graphic Design
Volunteer



Summer Hennessey,
Chef/Baker
Volunteer



John McMahon,
House Band
Volunteer



Ryan Weder, Barn
Electricity Project

PROMOTE

WARBLER RIDGE OPEN HOUSE
105
PEOPLE



RATTLESNAKE MASTER
238
RUNNERS/WALKERS



FIRST COLES COUNTY CLASS
10
MASTER NATURALIST
GRADS



GUESTS AT INPC FIELD SESSION
53
PEOPLE



As part of our mission, we work alongside a variety of community partners to communicate the importance of preserving and restoring natural areas.



The Community Foundation of East Central Illinois donated a barn to enhance stewardship opportunities.



Cargill Agricultural donated \$5,000 to Ford/Iroquois prairie stewardship. Representative Molly Stalker pictured.



The Sheeline-Berkson Family donated prairie restoration and interpretive signage in honor of Alice's birthday.

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS:

- Cemetery and Railroad Right-of-Ways: Where our Prairie Management Lives
- Master Naturalist Unit 19 Fall Field Day
- Illinois Nature Preserves Commission 122nd Annual Meeting Field Trip
- Eastern IL University Lifelong Learning Institute
- Land trust Exchange with Parklands & NICHES Land Trust

WHAT'S NEXT?



WE HAVE BIG PLANS IN 2020!

- **HOST** member events including Blazing Star Special Events
- **STEWARD** prairie sites with addition of Prairie Tech Position
- **EDUCATE** through addition of four new interpretive panels at Warbler Ridge and Loda Prairie
- **FUNDRAISE** through the EarthShare workplace giving program
- **COMMUNICATE** via expanded newsletter program
- **COMPLETE** forestry management plan for 1,000 acre Warbler Ridge
- **EXPAND** Citizen Science Monitoring Program
- **PLAN** future strategic conservation plan
- **ENJOY, EXPLORE & NURTURE** sites throughout east-central Illinois

EVENTS NEXT YEAR

- **Feb-November: 1st Saturday of the Month**
Warbler Ridge Stewardship Days
- **March:** Spring Member Meeting
- **April:** Warbler Ridge Spring Open House
- **May:** Plant Sale
- **August:** Master Naturalist Class Applications Due
- **October:** Fall Member Meeting
- **November:** Rattlesnake Master Run

Stay tuned for more details!

WISHLIST

- **Your Time, Your Talent!** Technology? Video? Construction? Real estate? Let us know.
- **Porta-Potty Sponsors** (you will be famously recognized! \$100/month; summer)
- **Trail Cameras**
- **Electric Chainsaw**
- **Bat Monitoring Volunteers** at WRCA
- **Natural Area Volunteers** for invasive plant removal
- Consider setting up an **automatic monthly or quarterly recurring gift**
- **Log your Urbana Park District volunteer hours to GPF**; we get rental credits for your time!
- **IOU to GPF:** Friends owe you a favor or payback? Have them donate to GPF in your honor!
- **Re-Gift Those Unused Gift Cards:** Not a fan of that restaurant, store or yoga class? We can use all of your gift cards as volunteer incentives, food at events, and more.



Be a Porta-Potty Sponsor!

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Remember that all GPF memberships end with the calendar year.

Did I donate this year? Can't remember? Never forget again! Our website allows you to set up automatic recurring donations!

You can determine the amount and how often you want the automatic gift to occur.

Visit grandprairiefriends.org and click on the green "Donate" box to set up recurring donations or use your online banking to set up automatic payments without any fees. Contact us with any questions.



SHOW YOUR GPF PRIDE!

Visit grandprairiefriends.org to order logo wear: shirts, hats, jackets and more!



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THANKS TO OUR 2019 GRANTING PARTNERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT!

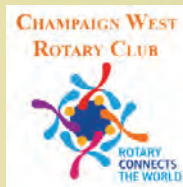
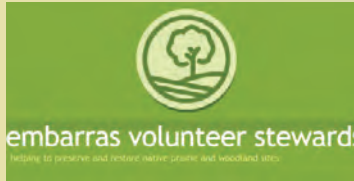


Illinois Clean Energy
community foundation



Community
Foundation

of EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS



Rattlesnake Master Run Sponsors:

Prospect Bank
Serra Ventures
Christie Clinic
Iroquois Federal Savings & Loan
Taylor Studios
Birkey's
Minuteman Press
Meijer
Esquire Lounge
Illinois Native Plant Society – Forest Glen
Mack's Twin City Recycling
Illinois Portable Toilets
Body n' Sole
Campus Ink

Support Us While Shopping

When you shop on Amazon-Smile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to Grand Prairie Friends!

Go to smile.amazon.com, designate Grand Prairie Friends as your charity, and start shopping!

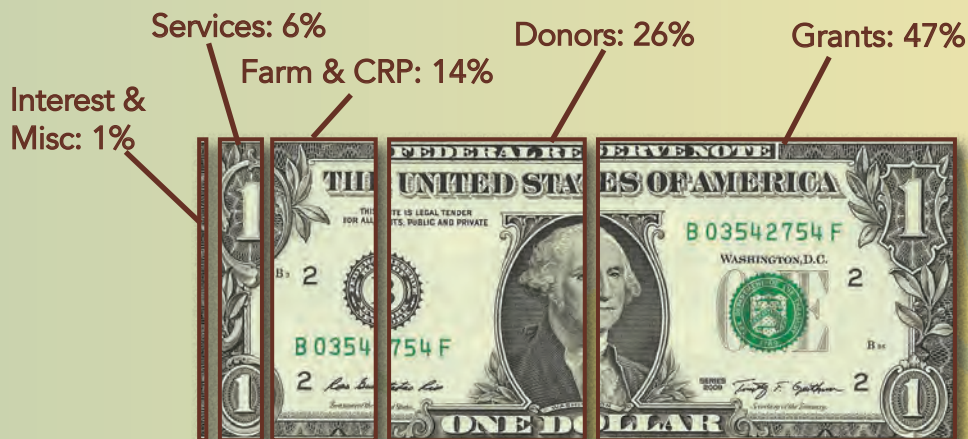


2019 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Where Our Money Came From

\$104,031
Your
Generosity!

Donations from Members and Friends	\$ 104,031
Technical Services	24,688
Farm and CRP	58,758
Interest & Misc	5,762
Restricted Land and Project Grants	189,707
TOTAL	\$ 407,046



How We Spent It

Bat Mitigation Project	\$ 142,840
Other Stewardship	136,324
Taxes, Insc, Legal, Acct	24,455
Administration	78,833
TOTAL	\$ 382,452

\$142,840
Helping imperiled
species!

PRESERVE RESTORE PROMOTE



GrandPrairieFriends.org

Mission

Preserve and restore natural communities in east-central Illinois and promote an understanding and appreciation of natural resources.

Board

President: Jamie Ellis

Vice President: Dave Easter

Secretary: Craig Milling

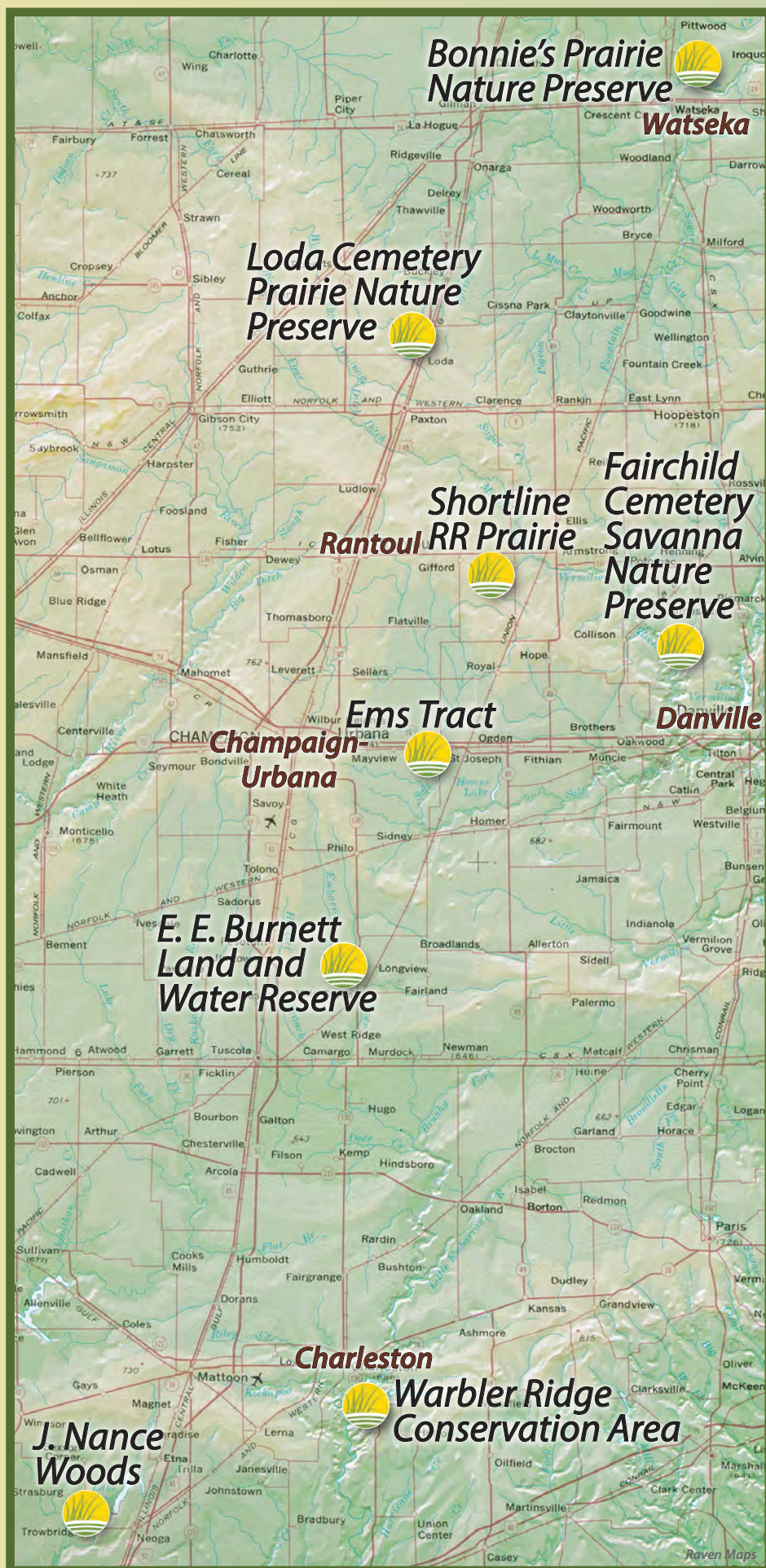
Treasurer: Ed Wilhite

Board Members:

Fred Delcomyn, Marissa Grant, Pam Leiter, Valerie Sivicek, Samantha Osborne

What is the Grand Prairie?

The Grand Prairie was a unique natural ecosystem in east-central Illinois. It consisted of thousands of square miles of tallgrass prairie and extensive marshes, interspersed with forested rivers and oak savannas.





GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS

PO Box 36

Urbana, IL 61803-0036

We celebrate you! Look inside for our 2019 Annual Report



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