



American Leadership for the Global Climate Crisis

The Challenge

Human communities and ecosystems throughout the world are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Many of these impacts, such as dramatic loss of Arctic sea ice, are much greater and occurring much more rapidly than climate scientists had predicted. Recognizing these growing human and natural impacts, WWF's overall climate goal is to limit the increase in global average temperature from pre-industrial levels to well below 2°C through an equitable global effort-sharing agreement. While a 2°C target will not eliminate damages to the world's poorest people and most fragile ecosystems, it lowers the probability of large scale species extinctions, catastrophic reductions in water resources in some of the most populous regions of the world, or increasingly rapid disintegration of ice sheets with resulting devastating increases in sea level.

Achieving this target remains within reach without serious damage to the global economy if the world acts soon and with ambition. In fact, with careful planning and implementation, policies to address climate change through increased energy efficiency and the development and deployment of renewable energy can lay the foundation for a new green global economy, help reverse the current economic downturn in the United States, and contribute to reductions in poverty worldwide. Moreover, investment in solutions to climate change will improve resilience to fossil fuel price shocks and also avert much greater ecological and economic damage caused by the future impacts of unmitigated climate change.

The Solution

To meet these goals, we must transform the US and global economies to be both low-carbon and climate-resilient. This will require that we establish a price for carbon emissions that reflects their true costs, while also employing a full package of policies and measures to transition the global economy to low-carbon intensity. This is not an "either/or" proposition; we must do both. Creating a clear carbon price signal will help repair global energy markets and ensure that market forces are being tapped to help solve the climate crisis rather than make it worse. At the same time, we must stimulate this new market through complementary regulations, mandates, and public investments in energy efficiency and low-carbon sustainable energy sources.

Importantly, we should remember that the climate crisis is global in both cause and impact. To limit warming to well below 2°C and address growing climate-related impacts, a new global

climate agreement must be reached. This will require renewed, vigorous leadership by the United States under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

This paper discusses several key areas where U.S. policy should be reshaped, both domestically and internationally, to ensure we lead the world towards a safe, sustainable future. We should:

- Establish a price for carbon by adopting an ambitious 2020 emissions reduction target
- Make investments and adopt policies to stimulate a green economy
- Lead the world toward an effective and equitable global climate agreement
- Support efforts to stop emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries
- Contribute to global financing mechanisms for climate mitigation and adaptation in the developing world
- Ensure that climate change-related impacts are addressed under the Endangered Species Act
- Improve science and information to prepare communities and ecosystems for unavoidable climate change
- Build public support for sustained action to fight climate change

I. Establish a Price for Carbon Emissions by Adopting an Ambitious 2020 Emissions Reduction Target

As with many financial markets, the current global markets for coal, oil, and other fossil fuels are broken. The market prices for these fuels are often artificially lowered by explicit or implicit subsidies. Moreover, they do not reflect key externalities, namely the costs of the damage to humans or the planet from burning them. Recognizing this, one critical approach to achieving emissions reductions (“mitigation”) is an accurate price signal. An accurate and reliable price signal would begin to resolve a key market failure and allow the business community to determine how best to incorporate the cost of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions into their planning processes.

A price signal can be best achieved by establishing a “cap” or a tax on GHG emissions. Although more direct and less complex, imposition of new taxes has been politically untenable in the United States and so attention has shifted from a carbon tax to a cap-and-trade approach to create a realistic price signal. While a tax directly affects the price, a cap-and-trade mechanism does so indirectly by creating a restriction on GHG emissions. Market forces would then help drive the most efficient and cost-effective ways to reduce emissions. Together with other policies and measures, establishing a price for carbon will help to transition the U.S. economy to a low carbon path.

As a prerequisite to limiting warming to below 2°C, global emissions should peak and decline well before 2020, resulting in a global emissions reduction of 80% by 2050 below 1990 levels. In its 2006 report, Working Group III of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) described a scenario for how the world could limit warming to 2-2.4°C. According to that

analysis, industrialized countries would need to reduce their collective, economy-wide emissions 25% to 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, while some developing countries would make “substantial deviations from business-as-usual” emissions by that time. The international community has focused on this path and the European Union recently reiterated its goal of reducing its emissions by 30% from 1990 levels by 2020, if a new global climate agreement is reached that includes comparable effort by the United States.

Due to inaction by the United States on climate change during the last decade, reducing U.S. economy-wide emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 will not be easy. Nonetheless, as we have at other times of crisis in world history, the United States must quickly mobilize its resources and lead the world, this time to preserve the chance of limiting warming to below 2°C and thus help limit the worst impacts on fragile ecosystems and the millions of people most vulnerable to climate change.

Working towards this level of U.S. emissions reductions by 2020 will require a mix of domestic and international approaches, including eliminating net emission from global deforestation and promoting the transformation of developing economies along a low carbon pathway. These international investments could help to meet some of our overall emission reduction responsibilities, but the vast majority of emissions reductions must be achieved at home, both to ensure necessary transformation of the US energy sector and in fairness to developing countries.

Recommendations

- The United States should set an overall economy-wide emissions reduction goal of 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 80-90% below 1990 by 2050. In order to achieve this goal, programs and incentives will need to be developed at the federal, state and local level that address all aspects of energy production, transportation and land use planning.
- At the federal level, a strong cap and trade program should be developed. All permits for emissions should be auctioned, with revenues recycled to lower-income taxpayers to defer any short term increase in energy costs while also being used for a few other high-priority purposes related to responding to the climate crisis. These uses include capacity building to reduce emissions in the developing world, support for adaptation (adjustments in infrastructure or practices to accommodate new climate conditions) in the most vulnerable developing countries, and strategic investments in a low-carbon economy. So long as a strong cap is set that closely tracks the overall emission reduction levels that are needed, a limited portion of the cap could be satisfied by domestic and international reductions from non-capped entities, if these reductions are measurable, reportable and verifiable. If a weaker cap is set, reductions from uncapped domestic entities and international reductions should be supplemental to the cap. Climate legislation must include credible ‘science look backs’ allowing targets to be modified through time in response to new scientific information.

II. Make Investments and Adopt Policies to Stimulate in a Green Economy

Experience with the emissions trading system in the European Union shows that establishing a price on carbon will not, by itself, quickly promote deployment of low or zero emissions technologies. Both domestically and abroad, wise investments are necessary to help the world transition to a low carbon economy. Coming efforts to stimulate the domestic economy and address the recession offer an important chance to invest in infrastructure and energy efficiency improvements that promote reduced GHG emissions. At the same time, we can greatly reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels, increasing our energy security and limiting our exposure to price shocks. We cannot miss this important opportunity to jointly address the economic, energy security and environmental crises.

Setting a price on carbon will help to enlist market forces to promote a low-carbon economy. But to stimulate these new markets it will be necessary to invest in a green economy through improvements in public transportation and smart energy infrastructure, the enactment of energy efficiency standards in all areas of the economy, mandates for renewable energy, and increased research, development and demonstration for low-carbon energy. Energy efficiency in particular offers the greatest near-term reductions in GHG emissions at the lowest cost and huge economic growth potential. According to a recent study by the Center for Energy, Resources, and Economic Sustainability (CERES), energy efficiency policies instituted by the State of California after the energy crisis in the 1970s created nearly 1.5 million jobs. Renewable energy sources like wind, solar and geothermal also offer the potential to power our economy and create new jobs, but start-up capital costs and existing transmission infrastructure favor incumbent fossil fuel sources. The recommendations below describe in general terms the kinds of steps that are needed to stimulate a new green energy economy.

Recommendations

- All aspects of the proposed domestic stimulus package should be designed to promote the transition to a low carbon economy, including improved public transportation, renewable power, smart grid transmission systems and energy efficiency programs.
- Stringent federal and state energy efficiency improvement targets should be set while also decoupling energy consumption from utility profit formulas. Energy efficiency standards should be combined with job training and public sector procurement and deployment of efficient products and designs.
- The federal government should introduce a suite of policies to ensure that any coal-fired power generation is done in a way that is safe for the climate. This should include an emissions performance standard for all new and, over time, existing power plants, similar to that already in force in California. This should be supported by a well-focused and funded program for large scale demonstration of carbon capture and storage technology.

- Federal and state transportation and land use policies should be redesigned to promote decreased energy use and eliminate tax and subsidy policies that currently favor suburban and ex-urban sprawl, transportation gridlock, and low quality of life. This should include federal mandates requiring new and substantial increases in vehicle fuel efficiency, promoting plug-in hybrid and electrical vehicles, and reforming federal transportation funding formulas to greatly increase spending on mass-transit-related infrastructure.
- A comprehensive federal program should be created to support dramatic increases in renewable power with a goal of producing all electricity from renewable sources, including locally generated renewables. An ambitious federal renewable portfolio standard should be established and regularly strengthened while federal subsidies to support renewable power production and R&D should be increased.
- The federal government should design a green jobs program that promotes the “win-win” of reducing energy costs for low- and moderate-income Americans, while creating new jobs to jump-start the economy. For example, weatherization programs for low-income Americans, such as the Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), should be fully funded and reformed to include an emphasis on fuel switching and decreasing carbon emissions.

III. Lead the World Toward an Effective and Equitable Global Climate Agreement

In the coming months, there will be strong pressures to focus on domestic climate and energy policies. While domestic action is the necessary condition for addressing the climate crisis, it alone is not sufficient. The climate crisis is inherently a global problem and requires a global solution. In addition to grave impacts to ecosystems and species, climate change poses threats to global food security, freshwater availability and political security throughout the world, including in areas already vulnerable for other reasons.

Why do we need a new global agreement? It is in the world’s interest and our national interest to reach a global climate agreement. Globally, an international agreement is the right vehicle to create a system to protect the poorest communities and most fragile ecosystems from the impacts of climate change. Domestically, an agreement will make it possible to achieve the deep reductions needed to avoid the most dangerous implications of climate change by creating market and other mechanisms for flexible implementation. Finally, leading the world to a new global climate agreement is in the best interests of US foreign policy and national security. For the last decade, the United States has blocked progress on an international climate agreement, which is a high priority for much of the world including many of our key allies. As we seek to rebuild America’s standing in the world and protect against climate-related instability, the administration and the Congress should reassert America’s global leadership by providing strong and active support for a new international climate agreement.

Recommendations

- In upcoming submissions to the UNFCCC, the United States should clearly commit to reduce its overall GHG emissions, as discussed above, and to contribute to adequate, predictable, and sustainable financial and technical support for action on mitigation, adaptation, and technology cooperation with developing countries.
- In international climate negotiations, the Major Economies Meeting (MEM) has been closely associated with the George W. Bush administration's unwillingness to engage constructively with the world on climate change and as a whole has been seen as undermining the UNFCCC process. If the MEM process moves forward, it should be reformed to greatly increase transparency, to include the heretofore excluded voices of countries most vulnerable to climate change, and to build consensus around key outstanding policy issues (such as competitiveness concerns, addressing high emitting sectors and improving technology cooperation).
- The United States should work with other nations to reduce emissions from aviation and maritime transportation (so called “bunker fuels”) including by engaging constructively in negotiations under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the UNFCCC with a view to securing a comprehensive global scheme covering these emissions sources.
- The administration and Congress should avoid the use of “border tax adjustments” and other similar mechanisms to address competitiveness concerns, and instead should assess which specific industries will be affected and then design policies tailored to those sectors, such as advanced performance standards combined with federal support for modernizing industrial processes to reduce carbon intensity.

IV. Support Efforts to Stop Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries

The forest and land use sector produces the second largest amount of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet; up to 20% of the world's total. Most of this occurs in the developing world, largely driven by demands from industrialized countries for forest products or for commodities like beef or soy that compete with forests for the use of land. For example, if the Amazon forest were a country, its emissions from deforestation would rank seventh in the world. But tropical forests are so much more than stored carbon. They are storehouses of the planet's biological diversity, while cleaning our water and our air. They have produced great advances in science and medicine and promise more not yet discovered. They are home to rich human cultures dependent upon the bounty of the forest for survival.

We cannot solve the climate crisis without finding a way to stop emissions from deforestation. At the same time, we must also protect the other environmental benefits provided by these forests while ensuring they sustainably support forest-dependent people, including indigenous peoples. Wise policy to reduce (and ultimately halt) emissions from deforestation and

degradation (REDD) can help meet global emissions reduction targets while also providing developing countries with the means to sustainably manage their forests and reduce poverty. Over the longer term, sound REDD policy would build a bridge to a future global climate partnership that includes mandatory reductions from both industrialized and emerging economies.

To meet these goals, the United States should support international action that seeks to stop net emissions from global deforestation by 2020. This will require both a strong REDD component in an international climate agreement as well as complementary policies in US domestic legislation. Domestic policy should create predictable and adequate funding for REDD—for example, by including REDD in a carbon market or through market-linked mechanisms, such as set-asides from auctioning emissions allowances. (Environmental and socially robust market-based mechanisms should be combined with an aggressive domestic cap, discussed above.) At the same time, adequate safeguards must be created to limit negative impacts on carbon price signals and ensure that financed reductions are real, measurable and verifiable. To avoid “leakage” (the increase of emissions in one location that inadvertently can result from steps to decrease emissions in another location), sub-national, project-based activities must be combined with national baselines and adequate host country institutions and policies.

To support these national programs, new and additional capacity building funding is necessary and should be an immediate priority. Although great progress has been made in resolving methodological issues and building capacity, more work is needed. With smart investments now in capacity building and supporting REDD pilot projects and early actions, key developing countries should be ready to make real, verifiable reductions in deforestation during the next commitment period, leading to a halt in net global deforestation emissions by 2020.

Recommendations

- Climate legislation should establish a program to create a sustainable level of support for REDD. This program should include a combination of financing mechanisms, including market-based principles, and be combined with safeguards, such as credit discounting or other measures to address impermanence and leakage, protection of ecosystem co-benefits and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples. These should be designed to ensure that reductions will not negatively impact overall carbon price signals, will deliver robust carbon benefits and will promote biodiversity and poverty alleviation in the developing world.
- To protect against leakage and ensure additional, permanent reductions, the United States should also support supplemental substantial funding for building the information and institutional capacity of REDD host countries. A steady stream of predictable funding, such as a small percentage of the resources raised from auction emissions permits, should be set aside for this purpose and coordinated with other donors.

V. Contribute to Global Financing Mechanisms for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation in the Developing World

The United States must be a proponent of helping developing countries transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies as well as providing support for ecosystems and human communities facing the greatest threats from climate change. Understandably, this issue is of the highest priority for many developing countries which bear little or no responsibility for the current crisis but face both deep poverty and the greatest risks from climate change. Therefore, American leadership in this area is not only a moral imperative (and long-overdue under our ratification of the UNFCCC), but it will also be the key to reaching a global climate agreement and so forestalling catastrophic climate change.

The key questions surrounding climate financing are: “how should funds be raised and at what levels?”; “for which priorities should they be spent?”; and “what mechanism should be used to disburse them?” These questions produce different answers depending on whether finance is directed toward adaptation or promoting emissions reductions. In the case of mitigation financing, market forces can and should be harnessed to maximize the necessary financing and create new markets for private sector investment in climate stabilization. Even in the mitigation context, however, purely market solutions will not be enough. Public funding, particularly in the early stages, will be necessary and will support capacity building and early pilot projects to allow markets to be developed and to mature.

In the case of adaptation, however, there is little confidence that sufficient market opportunities exist to rely on private sector solutions. For these crucial existing and future direct climate impacts, industrialized countries will need to step forward with new and additional public sector funding, technology cooperation and other support to help the world’s most vulnerable countries and ecosystems to adapt as much as possible to the negative impacts of human-induced climate change.

From where might the funding come? Several approaches have been put forth for creating sources of new, additional, sustainable public funding. These proposals include additional official development assistance, as well as “hybrid” approaches that channel a modest amount of revenues from domestic or international auctioning of emissions allowances or from assessing climate fees on bunker fuels. In the mitigation context, this public financing would be used to leverage additional, substantial private sector flows. WWF recognizes that the UNFCCC has a critical and legitimate role to play in governing climate financing. However, it is important to recognize that a new climate financial mechanism cannot and should not be the sole source of funding. Existing development aid and other funding must be maintained and extended.

How much funding is needed? Understandably, establishing a precise amount of necessary funding is difficult as climate impacts grow more quickly than expected and technology markets evolve. Nonetheless, it is important to consider current estimates of the range of necessary funding. In Poznan, the UNFCCC issued its Investment and Financial Flows Report (2007) which estimated that \$133 billion would be needed annually by 2030 to finance mitigation and adaptation in the developing world. It should be noted that this projection very likely

underestimates the cost of mitigation and adaptation, as it assumes a level of climate stabilization well above the 2°C increase that should be the maximum upper limit. All projections depend on the level of emissions reductions and associated damages and costs for adaptation. Therefore priority must be given to early investment in both adaptation and mitigation in order to substantially reduce the long term costs of climate change. Although the UN projection uses 2030 for calculation purposes, funding would need to begin immediately and scale up to the 2030 levels.

Who should contribute and how much? Recognizing their historical responsibility for the climate crisis, Annex I countries should bear the lion's share of climate finance support. Particular Annex I countries should contribute to global climate financing according to their historical responsibility for the climate crisis and taking into account capacity for contributions. Based on historical emissions, the United States is responsible for approximately 30% of accumulated greenhouse gas pollution in the atmosphere. Based on the imperfect UNFCCC estimate above, a fair U.S. contribution would be approximately \$40 billion annually by 2030. Even taking into account the global financial downturn, with the largest economy in the world, the United States has the greatest capacity to take on a financial commitment.

The financing required is a substantial sum but far from unprecedented, given the severity of the risks posed by the climate crisis. Recent bailouts of the financial sector across the globe show what the world is capable of in a crisis. If we can save banks in jeopardy, we must be able to also save a planet in peril.

Recommendations

- The United States should support a substantial and fair financial commitment to a new global climate agreement that reflects the leading historical responsibility of the United States for greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S. should agree by Copenhagen to make a corresponding financial commitment to annually support mitigation and adaptation activities in the developing world, scaling up to approximately \$40 billion annually by 2030. This should be new funding, additional to other existing and future foreign assistance.
- A new international climate finance mechanism should be developed that ensures adequate, predictable, and sustainable financial and technical support for mitigation, adaptation, and technology cooperation for sustainable development and emissions reductions within developing countries. In the case of mitigation, this mechanism should leverage, but not be limited to, private sector funding. In the case of adaptation, this mechanism should operate under the direction of the UNFCCC and cannot add to the debt burden of these poorest countries. It should be recognized that this new adaptation funding must constitute new and additional public moneys and that it would likely address only a portion of the adaptation challenge. Other adaptation-related international assistance would need to continue.
- In the UNFCCC process, the United States should push for the development of Technology Action Programs to achieve both nationally appropriate mitigation actions on the part of rapidly industrializing developing countries and sustainable financing for implementation of

actions in a number of sectors. These programs should focus on improvements in energy efficiency, research and development, and the use of low carbon energy sources.

VI. Ensure that Climate Change-Related Impacts are Addressed Under the Endangered Species Act

From its inception, the Endangered Species Act has been a key safeguard to protect animal and plant species threatened by human-induced changes to the natural world. If left unchecked, human-induced climate change could result in the collapse of key ecosystems and mass species extinctions. These impacts are already being felt today notably by Arctic species like the polar bear.

Although WWF agrees that the polar bear should be protected under the Endangered Species Act, related Bush administration decisions regarding the polar bear and the ESA should be swiftly reversed. The first decision relates to the enforcement of protections for impacts to the polar bear and its critical habitat. WWF submitted formal comments fully outlining many problems with the Section 4(d) critical habitat decision. Related to climate change, the Department of the Interior has said that when enforcing ESA protections for the polar bear, “section 7 consultation would not be required to address impacts of a [new] facility’s GHG emissions.” This decision entirely undermines protections for the polar bear and is inconsistent with clear scientific opinion regarding the impact of human-created GHG emissions on changes in the global climate.

The second decision broadly changes the Section 7 consultation provision of the ESA to circumvent Fish and Wildlife Service scientists during key impact analyses. Overall, this rule would undermine the integrity of legal protections for all protected species by removing expert Fish and Wildlife Service scientists from the Section 7 process. Specifically related to climate change, the preamble to this second decision states that “there is no requirement to consult on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions’ contribution to global warming and its associated impacts on listed species (e.g., polar bears).” This decision would effectively remove any power under the ESA to consider the cumulative impacts of human-induced climate change on the rarest and most endangered species and ecosystems. It should be swiftly reversed.

Recommendation

- The Secretary of the Interior should reverse the above decisions under the ESA and so allow the consideration of climate-related impacts on protected species. More broadly, the overall rule changes to Section 7 should be reversed ensuring that the agency’s top scientific experts on species protection are not circumvented during the consultation process.

VII. Improve Science and Information to Prepare Communities and Ecosystems for Unavoidable Climate Change

Climate change and measures to respond to it will touch many aspects of the environment, society, and the economy. The decisions we make in the coming years will determine the extent of future climate change and the degree to which we successfully adapt to changes that are already inevitable. A comprehensive national global change research enterprise must provide climate and global change science, a climate service, technology assessment, and measuring and monitoring capacity for monitoring emerging threats and implementation of international agreements.

The US government climate science enterprise, the US Global Change Research Program (GCRP)—known under the Bush administration as the US Climate Change Science Program (CCSP)—has provided valuable information that permitted the detection of climate change and the attribution of these changes to human causes. It is now necessary to transform US climate science efforts to rebuild their credibility after years of political interference in the release of findings, and to provide better information for management of climate risks. To increase coherence and coordination across the program, it is essential to give both the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Office of Management and Budget greater authority in the planning and budgeting process. The need for greater centralized authority must be balanced against the possibility of political interference in the release and interpretation of the findings of the program—and thus a politically independent oversight board should be established for the program. Finally, efforts to provide information on impacts and adaptation options for affected communities should be increased through a climate service and a revitalized national assessment of potential consequences of climate change.

Recommendations

- The resources available to the science program should be doubled to approximately \$4 billion/year in order to build adequate measuring/monitoring capacity and establish effective climate services.
- The interagency coordinating structure for the CCSP/GCRP should be reinvigorated with senior-level participation and an increased role for OSTP and OMB in coordinating program plans and agency budgets.
- A non-partisan independent oversight commission or board should be established to review the operation of the program, ensure that resources are directed to the highest societal priorities, and the guard against political interference in the release of the scientific findings of the program.

VIII. Build Public Support for Sustained Action to Fight Climate Change

While opinion polls reveal that the US public and political leadership finally is coming to recognize the seriousness of the climate crisis, public support for clear action remains soft. Depending on how the question is asked, as little as a third of the US public believes that climate change is a ‘serious problem’. There is a large partisan divide on the issue. Even though both major party Presidential candidates in 2008 supported long-term emissions reductions consistent with a 2°C target, many fewer Republicans than Democrats believe climate change is real, human-induced, and thus requires a policy response.

Because prospects for effective climate policy depend fundamentally on the perception of urgency and public support for bearing associated costs, it is crucial that a broad coalition of Americans across the ideological spectrum become more educated and engaged on the issue. The responsibility for this education and engagement falls upon all of us—government at all levels, civil society, and the private sector. The federal government can greatly contribute to this challenge by increasing and improving the way agencies and government officials inform the public about the climate crisis. As discussed below, reforms must be made in the way information about impacts from climate change are reported and used in federal planning and decision-making.

Recommendation

- In order to improve public awareness and understanding of climate change and its implications for society, federal resources must be mobilized immediately to communicate information on climate change, including impacts, adaptation, and mitigation on a sustained basis. This information should be based on the open research literature and should present diverse viewpoints.

Conclusions

The greatest hope for a fair and effective response to climate change is a new global climate agreement. Currently, much attention is rightly paid to establishing a cap-and-trade program domestically, but it is vital that the Congress and the administration place clear energy and financial commitments into supporting a new climate treaty while thinking very broadly about how to integrate climate-friendly policies into all aspects of governing, starting with an economic stimulus package centered on renewable energy, energy efficiency improvements and green infrastructure.

“American Leadership for the Global Climate Crisis” is one in a series of papers examining in more detail some of the issues raised in the Greenprint, WWF’s conservation agenda for the new administration.

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