

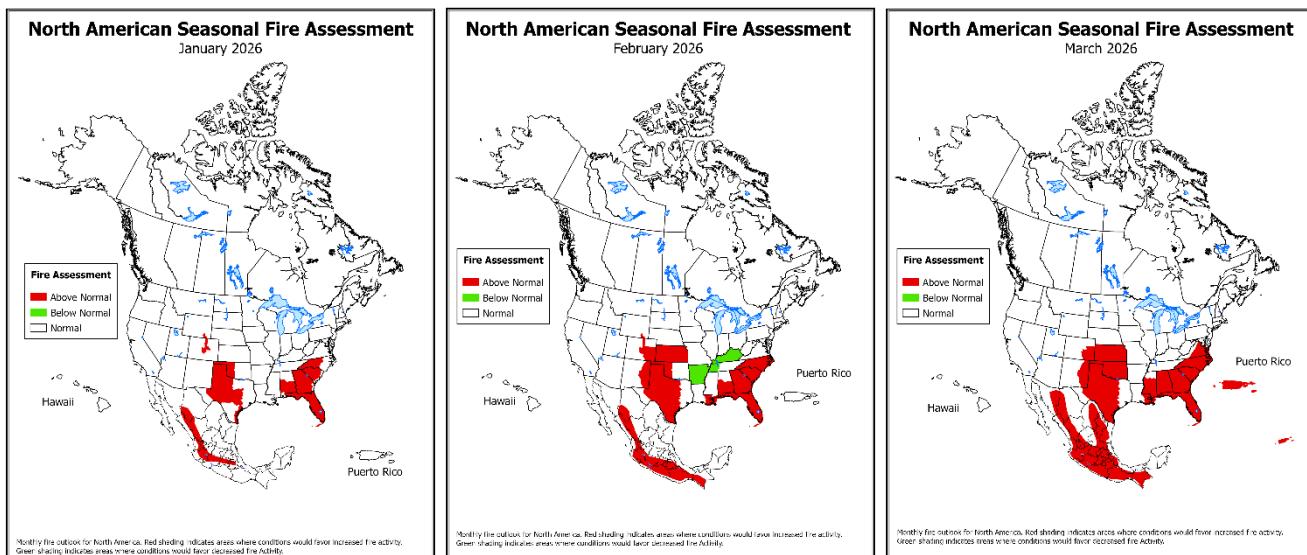
## North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

# **Outlook Period January through March 2026**

**Issued 16 January 2026**

## Executive Summary

La Niña continues to be the main driver of weather in western Canada. An active Madden-Julian Oscillation in phase six and seven also helped to exacerbate these impacts resulting in ample precipitation to the west and cold temperatures across the northwest part of Canada. An Arctic High-pressure system sat over the Yukon all of December, resulting in extended, extreme cold conditions. Eastern Canada was impacted by numerous low-pressure systems resulting in several days of significant weather for the Great Lakes region, rather dry, cool conditions in the Maritimes, and a snowy December for Newfoundland. Cool conditions in the Maritimes and eastern Hudson Bay coast led to greater than normal local ocean-effect snow.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for January 2026 (left), February 2026 (middle), and March 2026 (right). Red shading indicates areas where conditions would favor increased fire activity. Green shading indicates areas where conditions would favor decreased fire activity. *Click on each image to see larger versions.*

All the Yukon was 7-10 C below normal for December and several daily minimum temperature records were broken. Faro broke its all-time minimum temperature at -52.2 C. During December northern British Columbia was also 7-10 C below normal, but southeastern British Columbia was 4 C warmer than normal. Following the cool trend, northern Alberta and Saskatchewan were 6-10 C below normal. Southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba were 3-5 C below normal. Ontario was slightly cooler than normal over the entire province, with the coolest temperatures along the Manitoba border and in the Ottawa region. Despite this, a warm spell on December 18 set the daily maximum temperature record in Cornwall at 13 C. Cool temperatures extended into southern Quebec and the Maritime provinces. Montreal recorded 20 days with a daily minimum temperature below -10 C, while they typically have 12. Another cold spell gave Sherbrooke their lowest temperature ever, -28.6 C on December 9. This was the first month since November 2023 where Charlottetown had a below average monthly mean

temperature. For many locations in the Maritimes this was the first cooler than normal December in the last 7-12 years.

In British Columbia the entire province was wetter than normal in December. Most of the province received 100-200% of normal precipitation, though regions along the Yukon border and in the Peace River region saw 300-400% of normal precipitation. Notably, Fort Nelson received 86.2 mm of precipitation (468% of normal) and Chetwynd received 74.9 mm (391%) of normal. Much of Ontario received normal precipitation amounts outside of a band extending from the Lake of the Woods east to southern James Bay that received 100-150% of normal precipitation. This band of precipitation extended into Quebec and along the Hudson Bay coast. Additionally, during the final week of December, several precipitation records were set in southern Ontario. On December 28, the Greater Toronto area received 41.2 mm of precipitation and Sarnia 39.2 mm. Most of the Maritimes were normal to drier than normal, with eastern New Brunswick and central Prince Edward Island receiving 50-75% of their normal precipitation.

Many regions in the west received impressive snowfall amounts, some reaching 300-500% of the December normal. Chetwynd received 127.2cm (528%), Fort St. John 103.9 cm (358%), and Fort Nelson 55.2 cm (203%). This trend continued in southern Yukon with Teslin and Whitehorse receiving 325-375% of normal snowfall, with 71 cm and 69 cm falling in each location, respectively. However, parts of southern British Columbia along the south coast and west Kootenays received less than 25% of their regular snowfall. Additionally, central Yukon, which sat right under the Arctic High received less than 50% of normal precipitation. Several intense snowstorms brought above normal precipitation to most of Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, and southwest Manitoba. Near Grand Prairie and Peace River, Alberta there was more than three times the normal precipitation, and similar anomalies were recorded over the foothills and south-central Saskatchewan. In Alberta, Grand Prairie, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, and Banff received 515% (98 mm), 425% (50.2 mm), 336% (45 mm), and 308% (69.4 mm), respectively. Additionally, ski resorts in the Alberta Rockies received over 200 cm of snow. Southwest Alberta received normal to below-normal snowfall, resulting in some snow free regions in the far southwest part of the province. Ile-a-la-Crosse and Bredenbury, Saskatchewan both set unofficial records with 80 cm of snow during December. Farther east, Kapuskasing, Ontario had a snow depth of 170 cm, more than double the previous record. In the Maritimes cool temperatures led to ocean-effect snow and high amounts of snowfall to Cape Breton (100+ cm) and northern Nova Scotia (55-100 cm). Newfoundland received ample snowfall in December, with northern and western regions totaling more than 200 cm. This represents near 400% of normal for the Gander region. However, periods of above normal temperatures in Newfoundland decreased snow depths at lower elevations.

Fire activity remained at low levels across the US through December, although periodic slight increases in activity occurred in the Southern Area, typical of early winter. December precipitation was generally above normal for the West Coast into the northern Rockies, but well below normal for the Southwest. Well below normal precipitation occurred on the central and southern Plains with below normal precipitation stretching eastward into the Appalachians and Mid-Atlantic. Precipitation was closer to normal, on average, for the Upper Midwest and Northeast. Precipitation was generally below normal in Alaska and the southern half of Hawai'i, but above normal for Oahu and Kauai. To start January precipitation has been above normal in most of the West into portions of the Midwest, but below normal for the northern Plains and from Texas northeastward into the Ohio Valley and Northeast.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late December forecast a pattern consistent with a weakening La Niña. Below normal temperatures are likely from the Northwest into the Great Lakes, with above normal temperatures across the southern tier of states to the East Coast. Precipitation is expected to be below normal for the southern tier of the US focused on the Southeast. Precipitation is likely to be above normal for the northwestern US into the northern Plains, Great Lakes, and Ohio Valley.

Most of the US is forecast to have seasonally low significant fire potential for the outlook period. However, a gradually increasing footprint of above normal potential is forecast in the Southern Area to peak in March. Above normal potential is also expected into March for portions of southeast Colorado,

Kansas, and eastern New Mexico. A period of below normal potential is forecast in February from Arkansas northeast to Kentucky representing a slower start to the spring fire season there.

Recent weather patterns positively impacted drought conditions across Mexico. Average temperatures remained above normal during the October-November-December period. However, precipitation also exceeded normal levels in those three months, which resulted in a nationwide decrease in drought. Considering these factors and the current climatological analyses, warm and dry conditions are anticipated for January through March. According to the seasonal forecast for January through March period, below-normal precipitation is expected in the northwest, northern, and western regions of the Mexican Republic, with other areas near to a little above normal.

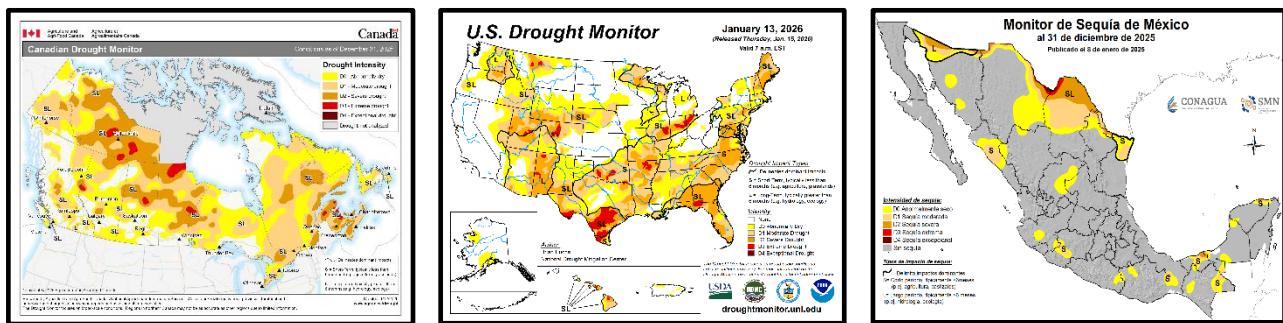
For Mexico, the wildfire season typically begins in January in the central and western regions. In February, it starts in the northern, northeastern, and southeastern regions of the country. Activity is projected to gradually intensify, reaching peaks in March and April due to the deterioration of environmental conditions.

## Critical Factors

The critical factors influencing significant fire potential for this outlook period are global climate patterns related to sea surface temperatures, particularly in the Pacific Ocean, and large scale, longer-term soil moisture deficits:

### El Niño-Southern Oscillation and Other Climatic Teleconnections:

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) remains in a weak La Niña state, with sea surface temperatures (SSTs) averaging between 0.5 and 1 C below average in the central equatorial Pacific Ocean. The CPC forecasts a weak La Niña to persist into for the next month or two, but with increased confidence in a transition to ENSO neutral conditions by March, with a 66% chance of transition. The negative phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) persists but has weakened significantly over the past two months as SSTs in the eastern North Pacific Ocean have warmed to near to slightly above average. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) has been weak over the past two weeks and is expected to remain weak into mid-January and not factor in this outlook. As a result, the weak La Niña and the negative PDO will be the main drivers of this outlook, modified by short-term changes in the Arctic Oscillation.



Left: [Canadian Drought Monitor](#) from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Middle: [United States Drought Monitor](#). Right: [Mexican Drought Monitor](#) from CONAGUA-Servicio Meteorológico Nacional.

## Drought:

The calendar year ended with substantial improvements in drought conditions throughout much of Canada. In the west, a snowy December helped to reduce some of the drought conditions. However, as of December 31, 77% of the country remained under abnormally dry to exceptional drought conditions, including 73% of Canada's agricultural area. This represents an improvement from November 30 in both overall drought (84%) and agricultural drought (80%).

The most widespread area of drought conditions extends from most of the Northwest Territories, down through northern Saskatchewan and into Manitoba. A large area of eastern Canada also remains very dry, with eastern Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island all with wide swaths of moderate to extreme drought. By contrast, much of southern Canada experienced significant relief due to rain and snowfall, with most of southern British Columbia except for the interior plateau, southern Alberta, and southern Saskatchewan showing significant drought improvement since late summer.

Precipitation across the US in December was above normal across much of California and the northwestern US, with some areas receiving 200-400% of normal precipitation. However, there were some localized dry spots in the Bay Area, southwest Oregon, and northern Columbia Basin. Despite the above normal precipitation in the northwestern US, mountain snowpack is well below normal for most areas, due to the warm nature of the storms and high snow levels. Precipitation was well below normal across the Southwest into the southern and central Plains, with many areas receiving less than 20% of normal precipitation. Much of the central Rockies, Ohio and Tennessee Valleys to the Appalachians and Mid-Atlantic were below normal, as well as most of the Florida peninsula. The northern Gulf Coast received slightly above normal precipitation for December, with most of it occurring at the beginning of the month. New England received below normal precipitation, but much of Michigan was above normal. Precipitation in Alaska was below normal except for portions of the central Interior, which received periods of light snowfall despite the very cold temperatures. Precipitation in Hawai'i was bifurcated, with Kauai and Oahu above normal, but Molokai south to the Big Island were below normal. Precipitation has been above normal to start the year in much of the West, and from Kansas northeast to Michigan. Otherwise, precipitation began the year below normal in the northern Plains, Texas, the Ohio Valley, and most of the Southeast.

Overall drought increased across the US with nearly 45% of the country in drought now in drought as of January 6. Drought developed and intensified across much of the southern Plains into the Mid-Mississippi Valley, Southeast, and Mid-Atlantic. Drought changed little in the Upper Midwest and Northeast, as well as New Mexico and the southern half of Hawai'i. Drought improved across the portions of Arizona and the northwestern US, including drought removal from much of Oregon, Washington, northern Idaho, Montana, and northern Wyoming. However, drought intensified in portions of central and southern Colorado. Areas of extreme drought persist in small portions of north-central Montana, central Utah, central Colorado, and western New Mexico. Other areas of extreme drought are noted in portions of South Texas, southern Oklahoma, Alabama, North Florida, eastern Illinois, northern Indiana, and northwest Ohio. Small areas of exceptional drought have developed on the Colorado West Slope and Texas Big Bend.

In Mexico, during the second half of December, four cold fronts December 22-25, the subtropical jet stream, an atmospheric river event, and low-pressure systems over the country caused rainfall above the climatological average in Baja California, Puebla, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, and the Yucatán Peninsula. This eliminated abnormally dry conditions in Baja California and reduced areas with moderate to severe drought in Tamaulipas, southern Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas, and Campeche.

Conversely, in the northwest, north, north-central, and west-central regions of Mexico, December's rainfall was below the climatological average. Consequently, abnormally dry and moderate drought areas increased in parts of the north, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Jalisco, and Michoacán. At the end of December, the national percentage of areas with moderate to exceptional drought stood at over 9%, indicating slight overall drought improvement over the month.

#### **Fire Season Status:**

On December 15, a small, fast-moving grass fire started near Fort MacLeod, Alberta. This fire was driven by a strong Chinook (downslope wind) event along the Rocky Mountains. While no damage was reported, this was an unusual event for Alberta. Fortunately, cool temperatures resulted in the fire being controlled within the day. Periods of burning for risk reduction continue, particularly in western Canada.

Chinook winds will continue to be monitored due to the relatively spare snow cover in southwestern Alberta. Periods of high winds, coincident with unseasonal high temperatures, will continue to present the risk of fast-moving grass fires.

The snowpack in Canada's Rocky Mountains, and a snowy December for northern Alberta is helping to lower some of the spring fire concerns for the region. However, southern parts of the Northwest Territories are having a dry start to winter, and this remains a concerning region for spring fires as do parts of the northeastern prairies. Additionally, parts of the Maritimes continue to receive less precipitation than is usual and more late winter-early spring precipitation is required to ease spring fire concerns.

In the US, fire activity remained at low levels across the US through December, although periodic slight increases in activity occurred in the Southern Area, typical of early winter. The National Preparedness Level remained at one (on a scale of 1-5) due to the low level of activity nationally. A total of 2,039,314 hectares (5,039,145 acres) burned through December 26, 2025, which was 68% of the 10-year average. However, the total of 72,068 fires was almost 122% of the 10-year average. Final 2025 fire statistics will be available in the 2025 National Interagency Coordination Center Annual Report issued by the end of January. For early 2026, as of January 9, a total of 3,302 hectares (8,160 acres) burned, which is over 230% of the 10-year average. The total of 870 fires across the US is 408% of the 10-year average.

Mexico experienced a significant wildfire season in 2025, with a total of 6,996 wildfires recorded across all 32 states as of December 25. These wildfires affected over 1,208,376 hectares. Most of the burned area, 95%, consisted of grass and brush, with the remaining 5% impacting timber. Of the national wildfire total, 1,434 incidents (about 21%), occurred in fire-sensitive ecosystems. These incidents burned 171,836 hectares, which is equivalent to 14% of the total area.

The states with the highest number of wildfires were Jalisco, State of Mexico, Michoacán, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Durango, Guerrero, Puebla, Chiapas, and Oaxaca. Together, these states accounted for about 73% of the national total. The states with the largest burned areas were Chihuahua, Guerrero, Durango, Sinaloa, Jalisco, Nayarit, Tabasco, Baja California, Campeche and Sonora. Collectively, they represented 76% of the total burned area nationwide.

## Canada Discussion

**January/February/March:** January temperature forecasts present a contrast between eastern and western Canada. The east will generally have normal to above normal temperatures with the greatest anomalies sitting over northern Quebec and Hudson Bay. Ontario and Atlantic Canada will sit near normal. Over the prairie provinces and southern British Columbia uncertainty greater, yet monthly temperature anomalies are likely to be slightly below normal. The coldest temperature anomalies will continue to sit over northern British Columbia and the Yukon, driven by Pacific troughing. Uncertainty is largely tied to the strength of the Polar Vortex. At this time, varying Polar Vortex strength is likely to bring periods of warm and cool temperatures and may lower the anomalies predicted by seasonal forecast models, resulting in closer to normal temperatures.

January precipitation forecasts point towards two drier than normal regions: northwest British Columbia and southwest Yukon along the Alaskan border, and Atlantic Canada. The former is likely driven by an absence of frontal activity impacting this region, while the later is likely attributed to steering of weather systems by the Polar Vortex. The central and south coast of British Columbia are expected to receive more precipitation than normal; this trend will extend into most of the southern half of the province and over the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. Additionally, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence regions in Ontario and Quebec are likely to experience enhanced frontal activity during January and receive more precipitation than normal. The British Columbia coast will receive most of this precipitation as rain, while the interior and western Alberta will receive snow. It is more difficult to predict a dominant precipitation type for January in the east due to the tendency for warm air to move in from the south. However, the

temperature anomalies point to the possibility that a bit more rain may fall during January than in previous years. Outside of these regions, the rest of Canada is likely to receive normal precipitation amounts. Despite these temperature and precipitation anomalies forecast for January, fire activity will remain seasonally low nationwide.

In February, La Niña conditions are expected to move towards an ENSO neutral state adding a layer of uncertainty to the long-range forecast. Models continue to show normal to slightly warmer than normal temperatures across eastern Canada. In western Canada, cooler than normal conditions persist across much of western Canada. However, this is likely tied to troughing and stronger La Niña conditions earlier in the month. As neutral conditions begin to dominate later in the month, troughing is likely to become less significant on the west coast and closer to normal or warmer than normal temperatures are expected to dominate as the month comes to an end.

On the east coast, the precipitation forecast is similar to the January forecast. Near the Great Lakes and eastern Ontario, above normal precipitation is expected as the Polar Vortex is likely to continue steering frontal systems into the region. Additionally, drier than normal conditions are forecast for Atlantic Canada. However, this region will continue to receive somewhat regular frontal activity (and associated precipitation) and a stronger than forecast system on a day-to-week scale may negate this negative anomaly. On the west coast, uncertainty from the transition from La Niña to ENSO neutral conditions is apparent between different precipitation forecasts. Troughing is likely to bring above normal precipitation to the coast in the first part of the month, with fronts less frequent the latter half of the month. The effects will be most apparent on the south coast of British Columbia and over Vancouver Island.

By March, neutral ENSO conditions are forecast to be firmly established. Given the transition, the March temperature pattern is muddied by differing model outcomes and timing. Forecasts are pointing towards normal to above normal temperatures across eastern Canada. Over western Canada, a cold anomaly is forecast to remain over the western prairies, northern British Columbia, and the southern Territories. In previous months this anomaly was driven by Pacific troughing. In the ENSO neutral state for March, it is more likely that variations in the polar front location will drive temperature extremes. In ENSO neutral conditions, less frontal activity occurs, and the terrain of western Canada plays a greater role in the precipitation pattern. As such, positive precipitation anomalies are likely over the coast and Rocky Mountains. Additionally, frontal systems will continue to move across the Great Lakes region and impact southern and eastern Ontario as well as southwest Quebec. Outside of these regions, generally normal precipitation is forecast across Canada for March.

## United States Discussion

**January/February/March:** Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late December forecast a pattern typical of La Niña into early spring. Temperatures are likely to be above normal across the southern third of the US during the winter, then spread up the East Coast during early spring. In the West, above normal temperatures are expected in January, then temperatures are likely to be near to below normal near the Canadian border from Washington into northern Minnesota for February into April, with equal chances of above or below normal temperatures elsewhere. Precipitation is expected to trend below normal for the southern tier of the US, particularly in the Southwest and along the Gulf Coast. Precipitation is likely to be above normal in the West for January and continue for the northwestern US into April, with above normal precipitation also likely across the Great Lakes into the Ohio Valley through the winter and early spring.

The northern half of the US is forecast to have seasonally low significant fire potential for the outlook period, but the southern half of the US will have above normal significant fire potential overall. In January, above normal potential is expected across most of the southern Plains, the Colorado Front Range, and much of the Southeast, including Florida. Above normal potential will expand across almost all the southern Plains into Kansas in February while persisting along the Front Range. Above normal potential will also expand in the southeastern US to cover the northern Gulf Coast into the Carolinas.

However, a slower start to the spring fire season is forecast from Arkansas northeast into Kentucky due to the forecast above normal precipitation the next two months. March will have expansive coverage of above normal potential, covering much of the central and southern Plains, then east of the Mississippi River to the Carolinas and Virginia. Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands will have above normal potential in March at their normal end of the dry season, as well.

## **Mexico Discussion**

**January/February/March:** The climate forecast for this period indicates warm and dry conditions. Although temperature and precipitation patterns are expected to remain near climatological averages under the influence of La Niña, the potential for extreme events (both dry and wet) cannot be ruled out. This is especially relevant due to the modulating influence of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the Pacific-North American (PNA) pattern. However, the opposing polarities of these remote influences within the forecast horizon maintain uncertainty regarding the effects of either La Niña or ENSO-neutral conditions.

Considering current temperature and precipitation patterns, the national drought situation, and the climatological forecast, wildfire activity across most of Mexico is expected to gradually increase in January, and continue to increase into March, where it will peak across the central and western regions. The overall trend will follow the seasonally normal occurrence of wildfires in Mexico, but with more activity than normal, especially across most of the mountainous regions.

## **Additional Information**

Additional and supplemental information for this outlook can be obtained at:

United States:

National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

[https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly\\_seasonal\\_outlook.pdf](https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf)

Canada:

Canadian Wildland Fire Information System

<http://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/home>

Mexico:

Servicio Meteorológico Nacional

<https://smn.conagua.gob.mx/es/observando-el-tiempo/monitoreo-atmosferico-ambiental>

## **Outlook Objective**

The North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook is a general discussion of conditions that will affect the occurrence of wildland fires across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Wildland fire is a natural part of many ecosystems across North America. This document provides a broad assessment of those factors that will contribute to an increase or decrease of seasonal fire activity. The objective is to assist wildland fire managers prepare for the potential variations in a typical fire season. It is not intended as a prediction of where and when wildland fires will occur nor is it intended to suggest any area is safe from the hazards of wildfire.

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