The Winter Newsletter 2014/15 is the third in the series and following on from the research reported in the last edition features the results of that research. The results of the Forestry Dependence Study of over 1250 households in forest communities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine takes the front seat, but there are also details of surveys in Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The FLEG II Program’s ongoing commitment to improving Forestry Governance continues, with new laws, new cross border cooperation and better access to information.

Moldova has led the way on activities for the young, when primary school children were taken out into the forest for a day, a new forest manual and events also feature. In the Spring Newsletter we will bring you the views of Key FLEG II players and we always welcome your views and appreciate your feedback, so keep in touch.
Forest Resources Vital to Many Rural Eastern European Households

First comparative study in northern boreal and temperate forests shows important role of declining forest resources

Despite gas infrastructure and the availability of commercial groceries, many Eastern European communities still depend on what they can collect from forests and nature to meet a significant portion of their household needs, and even for their survival, a new study shows.

Over the summer, FLEG II completed surveys of over 1250 households in forest communities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine as part of its forest dependency study. The group presented preliminary results of the study, one of the first of its kind in Eastern Europe and in northern boreal and temperate forests, in late October.

Forests provide up to 17% of income for rural households

"Forest and wild products are vital to the livelihoods of many rural people in Eastern Europe," said Riyong Kim Bakkegaard, the consultant hired by IUCN, to oversee the study. "Forests are important for subsistence and cash income at the household level, particularly in areas where poverty and a lack of jobs are forcing many people to move away."

Across the region, survey respondents cited over one hundred different products they collected from the forests, with the majority being various foods and fuel wood. On average, forest-derived income made up between 5 and 17 percent of total income in each country, with higher shares for certain, especially poorer, households.

Village Eghegnut (population 869) sits 1500 meters above sea level in the Lori province of Armenia and is one of the villages surveyed for the study. Forests provide an income and food for many households from products such as blackberries, strawberries, mushrooms, cornelian cherries, medicinal plants, and wild greens.

Pensioners make up one-third of the population of the village of Tatev in the high plains of south eastern Armenia, 1610 meters above sea level. Residents of all ages make use of the forest for fuel wood, wild vegetables, cornelian cherry, walnut, blackberry, wild rose berry, strawberry and medical plants.
Crucial role of fuelwood

While the study found that food resources, for both cash and subsistence use, such as berries, nuts and mushrooms, comprise over half of the total household income from forests, almost all country samples identified fuelwood as a central forest product. According to the study, fuelwood comprises 17 percent of all forest income and is collected mainly for subsistence.

However, study authors warn that the numbers likely understate fuelwood’s true value to rural households which can lead to underestimations of overall forest dependence. This is a result of complex regulations around fuelwood collection, which can discourage respondents from revealing their true level of fuelwood consumption.

Fuelwood is the main source of heating and energy for cooking in most forest communities and is essential to household survival in winter months. Across the countries, national government fuelwood provisions vary and are often not sufficient to meet the energy needs of rural households. In areas with available natural gas, it is often too expensive for poor households to make a total switch to gas for heating and cooking. As a result, much fuelwood is illegally cut and therefore unreported.

Declining forest resources

Communities also noted that forest resources were becoming less available. They cited reduced forest cover from both legal and illegal logging, overharvesting, especially from outsiders coming to the forest to “cash in” on lucrative berries and mushrooms, and destructive harvesting techniques that increase short-term harvests but hinder regrowth. They also blamed climate change for reducing forest cover, drying marshes, increasing disease and changing the distributions of forest products like mushrooms and cranberries.

“This study brings to light a significant reliance on forests that has gone unmeasured until now and which is at risk,” said Richard Aishton, FLEG II Program Coordinator for IUCN. “It also highlights the importance of incorporating the needs of people most dependent on forests into the policies which govern natural resources.”

The study authors are finalizing the results and hope to make them available to the public in early 2015.
The Ukrainian Parliament, elected on October 26, 2014, formed the ruling coalition and its participants signed Coalition agreement. This agreement is the action program of the parliamentary majority, and thus of the parliament as a whole.

The first two paragraphs of Section 5 of the Coalition agreement, dedicated to the Forestry Reform, are based on the recommendations that FLEG developed earlier ("First steps of the new government in the forest sector"). These recommendations were widely discussed in Ukraine throughout the past years, and were highly appreciated by the stakeholders.

According to the Parliament's action plan, state functions in the forest sector (policy formulation, control and economic functions) will be implemented by different government agencies. Now, all forest functions are de facto in the hands of one state forestry agency. Distributing them among several different government agencies will reduce corruption risks, according to FLEG's study "Corruption risks and shortcomings of legislative regulation of forest sector in Ukraine".

Ukraine will also create a unified state forestry structure on the basis of existing state forest enterprises, following successful experience of Poland, Latvia and other countries.

In another section of the agreement, the Parliament plans improving "laws and regulations related to ownership, management and use of land, forest, water and other natural resources to strengthen the protection of public interests and provide access for local communities to them as to the local development resources".

This decision is based on the study of Oleg Storchous, World Bank consultant, that was included in FLEG's proposed "First steps of the new government in the forest sector".

Including FLEG program recommendations into the Parliament's Work Plan is a proof of the high recognition gained by the program and an important step towards improving forest governance in Ukraine.
Survey results of a study show that 94% of Russian companies that supply timber to EU are aware of the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR), but 46% do not know any details about its requirements. Only one third of the companies have been approached by their European counterparts for additional information for timber legality, and every third company is not going to introduce any of due diligence system procedures.

“The survey shows that even though the businesses appear quite aware of EUTR, there is a huge gap in their interpretation of the essence of the updated regulations seeking to combat illegal logging and of how they should be implemented”, said Nikolay Shmatkov, WWF-Russia's Forest Program Head as well as FLEG II Program Country Coordinator.

“Based on the survey outcomes, the Russian forestry businesses and EU operators working with them should be provided with more information support as a way to help them adjust their operations to the new EU context and to start implementing the due diligence systems applicable to timber origin legality verification”, he added.

The results of the survey will be fully analyzed and brought to the attention of the European Commission, competent authorities of the EU countries, monitoring organizations, operators and international NGOs. Hopefully this information will help to bring more action to improve implementation of EUTR and make it a real force to tackle illegal logging in timber producing countries.

The methodology for the survey was developed by WWF-Russia in partnership with the Levada Analytical Center and NEPCon (a monitoring organization). The survey covered top managers of 100 Russian logging, timber processing and trade companies supplying timber, either directly or through supply chains, to the EU markets.

**SURVEY DATA**

Awareness level of Russian companies that supply timber to EU about EU Timber Regulations.

- I have never heard of the EUTR before
- I have heard something but do not know the details
- I have studied the EUTR and well aware of its content and requirements
- Do not know

▲ Russian pine logs ready to be delivered to the EU
Russia’s Largest National Park
Developing Ecotourism from Remnants of Quartz Mines

Yugyd Va National Park alliances of local interests inspire green development

Yugyd Va National Park recently created alliances with local citizens and businesses to help convert the park’s mining past into sustainable economic development. Many of the communities in and around the park are facing bankruptcy, so park officials hope to use old resource extraction infrastructure to promote sustainable ecotourism.

To make the transition, park staff created an alliance between businesses which hold this infrastructure and active citizens looking to develop start-ups that align with the park’s objectives: biodiversity and habitat conservation, environmental education, ecotourism and remediation of natural and cultural-historical landscapes.

Together with park staff, FLEG II consultants monitored both the existing infrastructure suitable for ecotourism and the park’s experience engaging local citizens and businessmen into joint projects. They found digging colorful crystals at former quartz mines is one of the most promising tourist attractions.

The park enriched this initial ecotourism “backbone” with additional trails, cave excursions and campfire places which have already created jobs for local people with minimum damage to the environment.

“Forming local, environmentally oriented development alliances between protected areas, local entrepreneurs and communities helps reduce unemployment and provides legal business opportunities in the area,” said Andrey Zaytsev, FLEG II country program coordinator for IUCN in Russia. “This in turn will help counteract illegal uses of the forest.”

Quick Facts

- At almost 19,000 km², Yugyd Va National Park in the northern Ural Mountains is both Europe and Russia’s largest national park.

- The park was established in 1994 and is well-known for its almost pristine boreal forests, deep caves and old quartz mines where tourists can still find colorful quartz crystals.

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▲ Tourists eagerly visit the abandoned “Orlinoe” dumping area of the quartz extraction factory where they can still find colorful crystals.
Progress Towards New Sanctuary in Tavush Region of Northern Armenia

A new sanctuary with an area of about 13,000 ha will be created to conserve rich biodiversity, including some endangered species.

In the frames of the FLEG I Program, WWF-Armenia initiated optimization of forest sanctuaries of Northern Armenia and in 2012 conducted a feasibility study on establishment of a forested protected area in Northern Armenia. The study was aimed at assessing the possibility to have one well-managed sanctuary instead of 3 existing ones. The study revealed rather rich biodiversity in the target area including flora and fauna with a number of species registered in the Red Book of Armenia and IUCN Red List.

The sanctuary is to conserve the diversity of flora and fauna, ecosystems and landscapes, support socio-economic development of adjacent communities and promote tourism development, ultimately to result in improvement of local population livelihoods.

Based on the study and in cooperation with the state forest management authority, the works on optimization are being continued in the frames of FLEG II Program with commencement of a task on mapping and clarification of the sanctuary boundaries. The overall initiative is aimed at strengthening the planning and management of forest sanctuaries through implementation of pilot projects.

The activities planned in the frames of FLEG II program include development of a sanctuary management plan and respective draft governmental decisions and implementation of some measures proposed by the management plan.


Quick Facts

- The optimized new sanctuary should include 3 existing sanctuaries with the current total area of about 13,000 ha, and adjacent areas to ensure the connectivity with the other protected areas located nearby.
- The activities are funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation.

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The planned forest sanctuary in Armenia will help save the diversity of flora and fauna and improve livelihoods of the local population.
FLEG Promotes Forest Safety in Azerbaijan

Forest-based recreation activities are rapidly increasing in Azerbaijan. However, visiting the forest is not always safe and fun. Sometimes, people face unexpected emergencies, which they are unable to handle. Visitors do not always know basic safety rules and can cause an irreparable damage to the sensitive forest ecosystem. The Forest Safety Manual addresses these problems.

The manual is the product of cooperation between the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) and the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) fostered by the FLEG II Program in Azerbaijan. It explains forest-related emergencies, forest fire safety, and prevention of negative impacts on the forest ecosystems to the public. It gives a wide overview of information on the proper modes of conduct in emergency situations.

“So far our main task was to strengthen forest-related knowledge among the youth and thanks to our partners in Azerbaijan and through series of Program’s publications, many children in the forest-dependent communities and beyond have been encouraged to take forest safety seriously”, said Azer Garayev, FLEG II Program’s World Bank Country Coordinator.

This is the first manual of its kind in Azerbaijan developed with the contributions of leading national forestry scholars and experts.

LEARN MORE:
www.new.enpi-fleg.az/en
Download the Manual (in Azerbaijani):
http://www.enpi-fleg.az/post/forest-safeguard-practices/

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Ukrainian Forest Agency Urged to Improve Public Access to Information

Public Council recommends steps for improving public participation and access to information to State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine

With public interest in forest management on the rise, a public council is recommending the State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine take a significant step toward improving public access to information and to involving local communities in decision-making and other forest management activities.

In its joint session with representatives of civil society and Regional Forest Administrations on 23 October, the Public Relation Commission of the Public Council of the State Forest Resources Agency (SFRA) of Ukraine recommended the SFRA undertake a number of activities to that end, including creating a new web-portal, accelerating approval of normative documents containing public participation mechanisms and promptly releasing information.

Before finalizing its recommendations to the entire State Forest Resources Agency, the Public Relations Commission heard presentations from experts of the FLEG II Program and from the Education and Research Institute of Forestry and Park Gardening of the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences (NULES). The analytical work and the joint meeting were supported by the FLEG II Program.

In its decision, the Commission agreed to pursue the draft “Concept of Internet resources development of the State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine” and to apply to FLEG II to support its implementation. It also suggested the Agency set up a web-portal development working group to include the FLEG II program, government administrators, civil society, scientists and educators.

“For local communities to have a say in how their forests are managed, they need access to up-to-date information and to the decision-making process,” said Roman Volosyanchuk, FLEG II country program coordinator for IUCN in Ukraine. “The information provided and the decisions made by the Commission are significant steps toward improving public access to information and participation in forest management in Ukraine.”

LEARN MORE:
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Over 50 representatives of government, business, scientific institutions, and NGOs gathered at a roundtable “On the implementation of the FLEG practices in the Russian Federation” during International Forum “Forest and Man”. They discussed the fulfillment of the commitments taken by Russia within the Europe and North Asia Ministerial Conference on FLEG. In November 2015, ENA FLEG process celebrates 10 years.

Among many results of the work done on the federal level in Russia, Alexandr Panfilov named such law enforcement measures as adoption of the Plans on Prevention of Illegal Harvesting and Trafficking of Timber, increased activities on distant forest monitoring using aerospace methods, and development of new legal acts aimed at combating illegal logging and illegal timber trade.

The participants of the round table pointed out that gradually, the view on FLEG issues is changing in the regions of Russia. They have developed and are implementing integrated measures on the prevention of illegal logging and illegal timber trade. Law enforcement, customs and tax authorities signed inter-agency agreements and are organizing joint inspections and forest patrolling.

Andrew Mitchell, FLEG II Program Director and World Bank Forestry Specialist, believes that one of the major Program results in all seven participating countries is significant progress on the directions set up by the St. Petersburg Declaration. “Perhaps the FLEG Program’s most important contribution is the steady, sustained effort to improve governance, which involves changing behavior, that takes time. Many interlocking pieces have to come together but due to external factors and changing circumstances, improving forest governance will always be a work in progress. So we need to continue working on this topic and to strive for real improvements in this important and vital sector”.

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Russia Sums Up Results of St. Petersburg Declaration

“During the past years, Russian forestry sector has experienced a number of important changes related to FLEG”, believes Alexandr Panfilov, deputy head of the Russian Federal Forestry Agency.

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The goal of the round table was to assess the implementation of FLEG practices in Russia.
FLEG Workshops Connect Children with Forests

Interactive “Discover Your Forests” events engage students in Moldova

This autumn, more than 100 children of 8 to 16 years from three orphanage schools in Moldova discovered the value of forests beyond just as sources of wood.

Experts in forestry, environment and communication sciences shared interactive lessons with children in the Strasei, Orhei and Hancesti districts directly in their classes as well as in the forests nearby. Children learned about the forests where they live and the relationships between forests and humans, including what the future of forests might be under various scenarios such as climate change and unsustainable use.

At the end of the workshop, children competed in a contest to test what they had learned. The winners will be featured on television in a project called “Children and Forests” in 2015.

“**We knew a lot of things about forests from our classes, but I came to the point that I do not know many other things about them. Though huge trees look strong, they also seem to be vulnerable in front of human pressure**”

— Valentin Cupcea
12-year-old schoolboy from Orhei orphanage school, who won first place in the contest

The Moldovan Government forest agency, Agency Moldsilva, implemented the workshops in cooperation with FLEG II and media agency Antis-Media

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The document has been developed by the Ministry of Forestry and endorsed by the Government of Belarus. The preparation was accompanied by intensive consultations in the professional forestry and academic communities, as well as the private sector.

The purpose of the Strategic Forestry Development Plan is the “creation of highly productive and sustainable forests, conservation and efficient use of their biological and landscape diversity, taking into account climate change and the interests of the green economy, implementation of a multi-purpose and complex science-based economic management system”.

At a meeting in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, FLEG II Program expert Alexey Bobrinsky took part in the meeting of the Coordinating Council for the Protection of Forests of the Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia’s second largest region. The Council consists of representatives of various government agencies of different levels, including the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Krasnoyarsk Krai, as well as NGOs.

The Council discussed the problem of reducing the payment rate per volume unit of logged wood that was damaged by pests, wind, fire, and other natural disasters. The participants concluded that the quantitative criteria of the quality loss set for such wood in the existing forestry legislation is not sufficient. Additional quality assessment criteria should be developed in order for this legislative rule to be accepted for practical application. The Council is now preparing the list of the proposed amendments.

FLEG has contributed to development of sustainable forest management in Belarus

The FLEG II Program provided analytical support to the development of Belarus' Strategic Forestry Development Plan for 2015-2030.

FLEG helps develop proposals to amend Russian forest legislation

The proposed amendments will allow to set criteria for reducing payment rate for logging wood that was damaged by natural disasters.

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Cross Border Collaboration between Armenia and Georgia to Address Illegal Logging

Illegal forest use was identified as the number one problem at a round table discussion between Armenia and Georgia forest practitioners, to build strong ties between the forestry representatives of two neighbouring countries.

The event was supported by the FLEG II Program and participants discussed current forest-related situations, identified existing gaps in the sector, as well as pinpointing an efficient and practical scheme for future cooperation.

“There is a general knowledge about neighboring countries’ forests, however there also is a lack of collaboration”, stated Mamuka Iordaniashvili, Head of Legal Department at NFA of Georgia. “During these three days we realized that we have the same problems and addressing issues in bordering forests, joint effort will only lead to more efficient solutions for both of the countries”. It was agreed that later a Memorandum of Collaboration would be developed and signed by respective Ministries of Armenia and Georgia.

Training on Implementation of Regulation on “Wood Tracking System”

The FLEG II Program has supported a series of trainings on the theory and practical application of the “Round Timber Regulations” for the forest practitioners of Armenia, who are on the frontier of ensuring sustainable forest management.

Three sets of two-day trainings were organized and carried out by a local consultant. All 19 forest enterprises of “Hayantar” SNCO attended. This interactive training and gave hands on experience of the implementation of the regulations.

The training was based on the ‘Round Timber Regulations’ and Manual, which were developed under the auspices of the FLEG I Program. Round Timber Regulation concerns using wood marking hammers, personal stamps for the people making registration, numbered labels and staplers with their needles and tapes, in order to monitor wood movement in the supply chain.

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During a meeting organized by WWF on December 16, 2014, Georgiy Bondaruk, FLEG II program consultant, presented a draft outline of the assessment, carried out under the FSC scheme, to the members of the Working Group of Georgia on FSC Standards, and received their comments.

The next stage will involve finalization of the first draft, which will be followed by a comprehensive stakeholder discussion in accordance with FSC procedures.

The assessment document, if endorsed by FSC, would enable interested wood processing companies to assess management performance (i.e. the levels of risk) in the forests of Georgia where they source timber. Wood produced in so-called low risk zone could be assigned controlled status. Controlled wood can be mixed with FSC-certified wood products and sold with the status FSC-certified mixed.
Voluntary Forest Certification Potential in Azerbaijan

An analysis was conducted by WWF in the framework of the FLEG II Program.

The results of the analysis draw attention to current situation in the Azerbaijan forestry sector in terms of conditions for FSC-based certification. The analysis shows that forest certification of Azerbaijan forests can be considered as an instrument for sustainable forest management. There are no serious contradictions between the requirements of the FSC principles and criteria and the current forest management situation. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to carry out a significant amount of preparatory activities for the certification process.

FLEG II Promotes Forestry Protection at Caspian Technologies for Environment Exhibition

The FLEG II Program participated in the exhibition for the third year running, to raise awareness of pressing forest problems and important forest-protection activities implemented by the FLEG Program in Azerbaijan.

The FLEG II exhibition stand featured the development of the young foresters movement; climate change adaptation and mitigation; Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity scoping study (TEEB).

Vusala Suleymanova, an active young forester from the Gakh district of Azerbaijan, answered visitors’ questions. These included students, teachers, governmental employees, forest and educational specialists and even such VIP guests as the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Huseynulu Baghirov, who stopped by the stand to learn more about the ongoing activities and achievements.

The Caspian Technologies For Environment Exhibition is an ecological international exhibition supported by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan and IDEA Public Union. It is the only environmental event held annually in the Caspian and Caucasus regions.
What is Voluntary Forest Certification?
Forest certification is an independent verification procedure to check that forests are managed in a sustainable way. The objective is to establish credibility through verification of conformity to agreed standards or performance indicators.

What does Voluntary Forest Certification Involve?
It involves an inspection of the forest management by an independent organisation to check that it passes the internationally agreed principles of good forest management. The path of the timber and pulpwood is audited from where it originates through all the steps of the production process until it reaches the end user.

Who Manages Voluntary Forest Certification?
The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), based in Oaxaca in Mexico, was the first management organisation established to manage voluntary certification and it operates on a global basis. FSC’s main role is to accredit and monitor the certifying companies that carry out the forest audits. Products emanating from an FSC certified forest are allowed to carry the FSC label.

Another well known certification system is the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
About ENPI FLEG Program

The Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) II European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) East Countries Program supports participating countries’ forest governance. At the regional level, the Program aims to implement the 2005 St. Petersburg FLEG Ministerial Declaration and support countries to commit to a time-bound action plan; at the national level the Program will review or revise forest sector policies and legal and administrative structures; and improve knowledge of and support for sustainable forest management and good forest governance in the participating countries, and at the sub-national (local) level the Program will test and demonstrate best practices for sustainable forest management and the feasibility of improved forest governance practices at the field-level on a pilot basis. Participating countries include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. The Program is funded by the European Union.
http://www.enpi-fleg.org

Project Partners

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
The European Union is the world’s largest donor of official development assistance. The European Commission’s Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) manages the bulk of the Union’s financial and technical assistance to the neighbourhood and enlargement countries. By implementing assistance actions in Europe’s eastern and southern neighbourhood, DG NEAR supports reform and democratic consolidation, and strengthens the prosperity, stability and security around Europe. DG NEAR helps to promote EU values, policies and interests in this region, and to contribute to developing the special relationship of the EU with its neighbouring countries.
http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

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IUCN
IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN’s work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice. IUCN is the world’s oldest and largest global environmental organisation, with more than 1,200 government and NGO members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN’s work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.
www.iucn.org

WWF
WWF is one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.
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