MULTISAR
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The 20th Anniversary of the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women

The Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women celebrated its 20th anniversary in the summer of 2023. This annual two-day school brings together rural women to network, share experiences, develop and enhance farm and ranch management skills, and to increase awareness of landscape management options for environmental and habitat stewardship. The school is organized and hosted by a core group of people from the following organizations: Cows and Fish, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Government, Prairie Conservation Forum, Counties/MDs, and various other colleagues who want to help out.

Over the years, the school has travelled to 18 different rural locations (Table 1) and has hosted 1,386 attendees, with many ladies returning multiple years. Each year, attendance is limited to 40-50 ladies to keep the setting intimate and manageable.

Table 1. Location of the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women over the past 20 years.

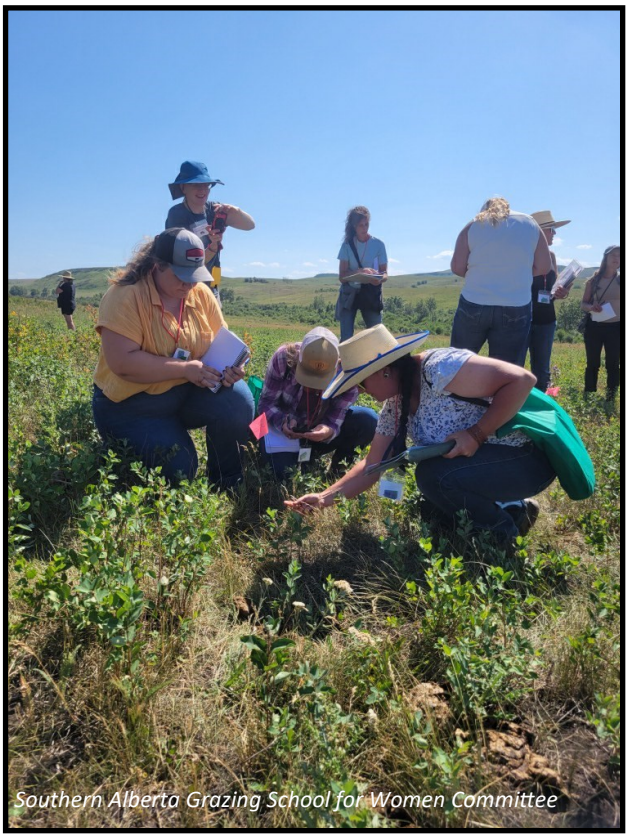
Location	Year	Location	Year
Pincher Creek	2004/2014	Delia	2012
Stavely	2005/2018	Foremost	2013
Brooks	2006	Dinosaur Provincial Park	2015
Elkwater	2007/2016	Munson	2017
Rowley	2008	Milk River	2019
New Dayton	2009	Oyen	2022
Milo	2010	Longview	2023
Nanton	2011	Online only during covid	2020/2021

Anne Stevick, a third-generation rancher from southeast of Pincher Creek, who has attended the school 12 of the 20 years says this about the grazing school: “I did not know what to expect when I attended the first Grazing School for Women in Southern Alberta in 2004, at the Bloomin’ Inn in Pincher Creek, along with 26 other ranch women. Ranch women have a lot to contribute and they look at things with a different perspective. It turned out to be one of the best events I had ever attended for practical range education and the networking with other like minds was fantastic”.

Core components presented and learned in the field at every grazing school include grazing principles and practices, range health assessments, plant identification, riparian health assessments, and Ranching Women talks.

20th Anniversary of the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women (continued)

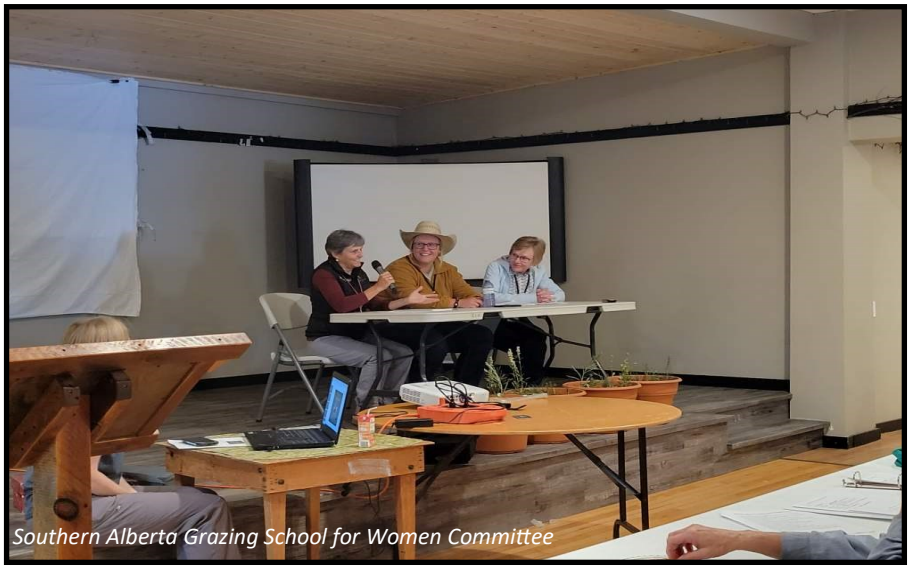
The grazing school hopes to provide the ranching ladies with some tools they can take home to their operation to look at their own range and riparian health, to identify problem areas in order to adjust management decisions to better their operation, and to improve habitat. For example, some ideas to incorporate could include adjusting stocking rates and grazing regimes, fencing off riparian areas and providing off-stream water sources (i.e., using watering units), incorporating appropriate salt placement away from water sources, targeted grazing of weeds with the use of temporary electric fencing, etc.



Ranching ladies learning plant identification and range health.

Over the years, the Ranching Women talks have become one of the favourite parts of the grazing school. During these, local women can showcase their properties and share their wins and their struggles. These talks always spark open and candid discussions where all the attendees learn from each other. The ladies openly discuss things such as herd types, enhancements on the landscape, weed control, succession planning, new innovations, the ranching lifestyle, and even the different perspectives their partners bring to the table.

In addition to the core topics, the grazing school also delivers extra relevant material through targeted guest speakers and tours. These have included presentations on wildlife and species at risk and how they fit in with your ranching operation, range research being conducted in the local area, herd welfare, possible funding sources for enhancements, weed control, mental health in agriculture, and so much more!



A Ranching Women panel featuring some dedicated grazing school attendees (left to right): Franziska Britschgi, Katie Durec, and Jackie Rodvang.

The success of the Southern Alberta Grazing School for women stems from bringing passionate women together in one place to support each other and to share knowledge and ideas. The ranching way of life is not an easy one, but knowing there are other women working towards similar goals and have the same love for the lifestyle is empowering. Here's to 20 more years of learning from each other! Keep an eye out for the 21st grazing school coming to a rural area (possibly near you).

20th Anniversary of the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women (continued)

Women's Grazing School Participant Past Comments

"Programs like this are needed to keep family farms going and empower women in ag."

"I learned there are so many types of grasses and when to best graze them."

"Always good to hear how others do things and what is possible."

"I have never attended an event where it feels like a close knit community like this grazing school. The work everyone does is amazing and inspiring!"

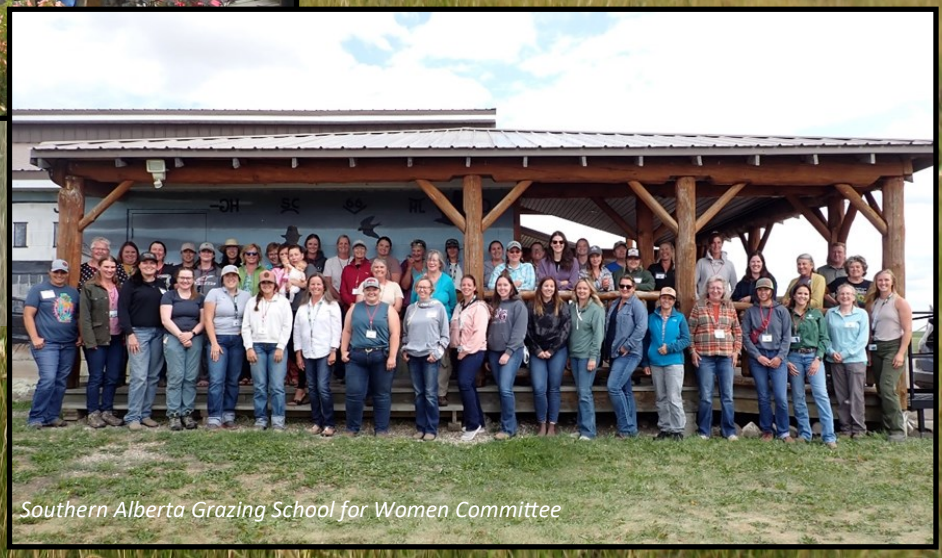
"Vast amount of knowledge and resources presented."

"Maintaining litter is a really good tool to drought proof your range."

"I learned how strong, smart, tough, and determined the women in the industry are."

"Plan to return with my daughter next year."

Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women Committee



Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women Committee

Participants of the first Southern Alberta Grazing School held in Pincher Creek in 2004 (left) and the most recent participants of the grazing school held in Longview in 2023 (right).

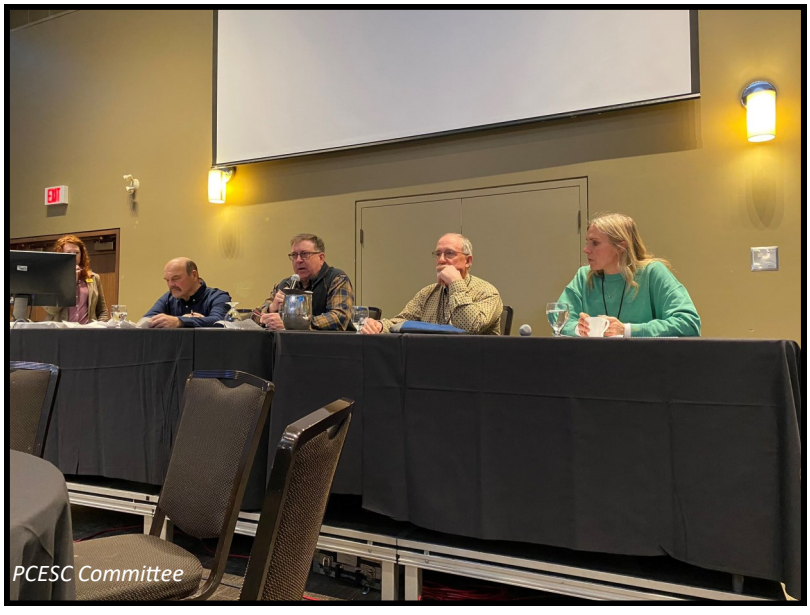
Prairie Collaboration, Connection and Conservation – Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference 2023

Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference
Calgary, Alberta | February 21-23 2023

After being postponed one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2023 marked the much-anticipated thirteenth assembly of the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference (PCESC). The PCESC is a triennial event, rotating between Canada's three prairie provinces, with Alberta hosting this year's event at the Calgary Zoo under the theme "Prairie Collaboration, Connection, and Conservation". Since its inception in 1986, the PCESC has fostered a community where researchers, First Nations, agricultural producers, environmental professionals, and nature enthusiasts can come together to share ideas, discuss new management approaches, and celebrate the achievements of our colleagues in prairie conservation. The PCESC kicked off with an opening reception and art show where attendees were welcome to mingle while taking in exhibits from local Alberta artists with a passion for the prairies. MULTISAR staff were pleased to assist with the delivery of this sold-out event and contributed through various means, including participating in planning committees, providing on the ground assistance for the conference events and activities, and delivering presentations.

MULTISAR staff delivered two presentations, with one highlighting the preliminary results of a study evaluating the relationship between insects, vegetation, and grassland birds on a MULTISAR restoration site, while the second presentation explored the spatiotemporal interactions of species found in a grassland community from camera trap data. Two poster presentations were also given by MULTISAR staff. One poster focused on the MULTISAR process and how our connection with ranchers, combined with MULTISAR's grassroots collaborative approach, has led to the conservation success story of this program. The second poster presented the results of a study where the optimal top wire height for deer species to cross over the fence, while maintaining its integrity as functional ranching infrastructure, was determined. Studies like the ones presented help to guide conservation tools and practices commonly recommended and implemented through the MULTISAR program.

An exciting addition to the 2023 PCESC was the fifth and final plenary session of the conference – a rancher's panel where five local ranchers answered questions and discussed how they view their role in grassland conservation. These individuals donated their time to give their perspective on a variety of topics. Themes addressed in the panel discussion included the role ranchers play in the conservation of prairie and endangered species, how the opportunities to work with government and non-profit organizations has changed over the years, and if they feel the attitude towards the programs these organizations offer has changed as well.



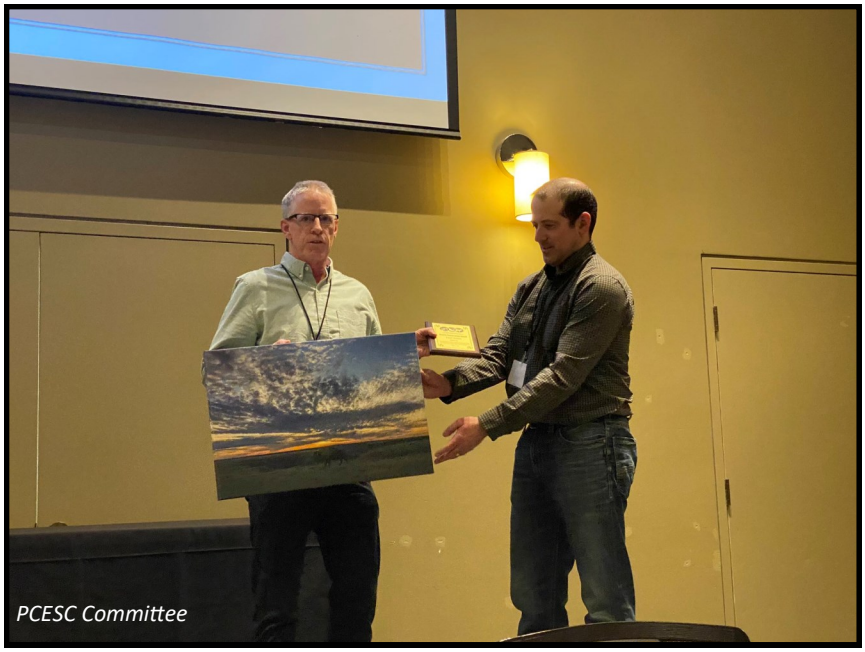
PCESC Committee

The 2023 PCESC Conference featured a rancher's panel where local ranchers discussed a variety of topics including their role in grassland conservation.

Prairie Collaboration, Connection and Conservation – Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference 2023 (continued)

The rancher's panel was a focal event for MULTISAR as four of the panelists are current MULTISAR partners. Having ranching partners in the MULTISAR program who were willing and eager to help advance the conversations surrounding grassland conservation in the spirit of collaboration and connection reaffirms the position ranchers hold as core prairie conservationists, and how grateful MULTISAR is to be working with them.

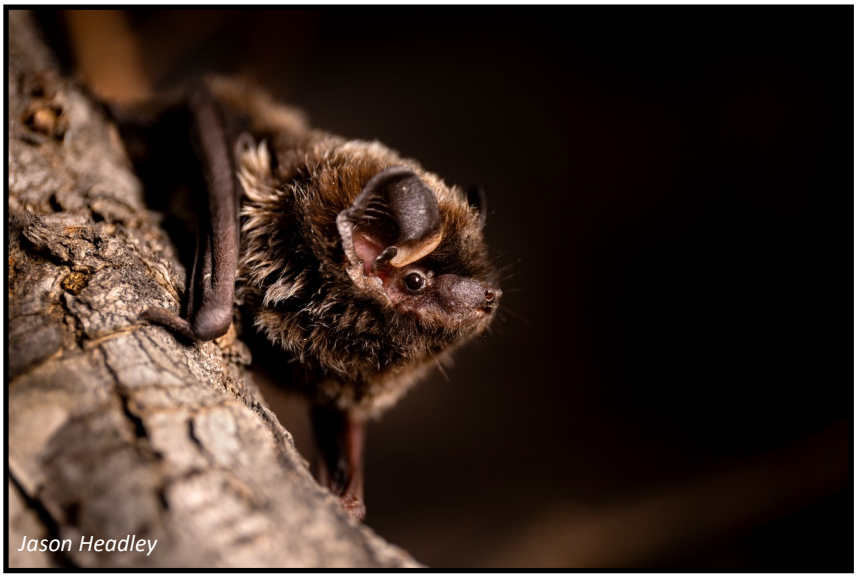
The awards session during the banquet highlighted an important member of the MULTISAR team, with Paul Jones receiving the Prairie Conservation Award for Alberta. The Prairie Conservation Award recognizes the long-term contributions of an individual to the conservation of native prairie or grassland species at risk. Three awardees representing each of their respective prairie provinces is chosen by a selection committee of their peers and are evaluated using a five point criterion; 1) achievements in the conservation of native habitat and species at risk in the Prairies Ecozone; 2) exceptional commitment and innovation; 3) enduring commitment; 4) significant accomplishments in terms of results; and, 5) recognition of how receiving this award will further native prairie habitat and species at risk conservation. Paul was selected for this award due to his comprehensive past with prairie conservation and public outreach. Paul is an Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) biologist and was one of the primary contributors in the development of the MULTISAR project. He helped to promote several partnerships and collaborations, resulting in one of the most successful stewardship programs in Alberta. Additionally, Paul is one of the leading international authorities on pronghorn migration and fence ecology, and his research has contributed to species at risk management, native prairie restoration, and private landowner engagement in voluntary conservation programs. The focus of Paul's current work is the assessment of habitat connectivity and the role of fences, as well as the evaluation of modifications to make fences more permeable to pronghorn and other ungulate species. His passion for public outreach has spread awareness about pronghorn management and native prairie/species at risk conservation through his numerous presentations at conferences and other events. Paul has also been featured in interviews and documentaries from Canada and the U.S. and has organized the ACA Speaker Series for Writing on Stone and Beauvais Provincial Parks, the Wildlife in the Wind Speaker Series in Lethbridge, and the ACA Friday Night Speaker Series to encourage the public's passion for wildlife. Paul is a humble mentor willing to provide guidance to his colleagues whenever he is able. Congratulations to Paul on this well-deserved award!


PCESC Committee

MULTISAR team member, Paul Jones, with the Alberta Conservation Association received the Prairie Conservation Award for Alberta at the 2023 PCESC Conference.

We would like to thank all of the sponsors and volunteers who helped to make the 2023 PCESC a success and are looking forward to the event in 2026 hosted in Saskatchewan.

Species Profile: Alberta's Migratory Bats


Jason Headley

The silver-haired bat is one of three migratory bat species in Alberta that have recently been designated as 'Endangered' by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

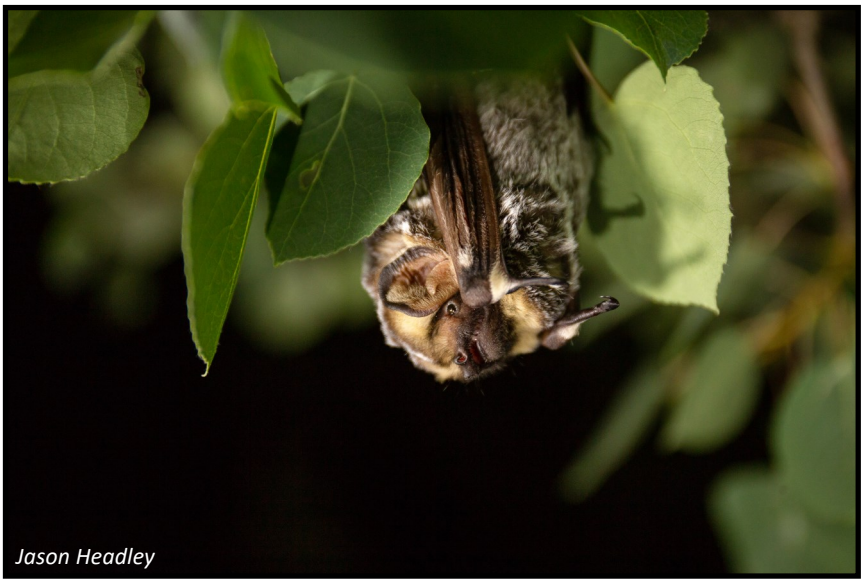
Description: Bats are amongst the most diverse groups of organisms in the world, with more than 1,400 species identified. They are the second most plentiful group of mammals on the planet, dwarfed only by the rodents. Though the bulk of this impressive diversity is found in the tropical and subtropical regions of the globe, Alberta is home to several bat species, all of which play an integral role in their respective ecosystems.

Nine bat species are known to regularly occur in Alberta. These species can be divided into two main categories: those migrating long distances to escape the winter cold, and those remaining year-round. Migratory bats in the province include the eastern red *(Lasiurus borealis)*, silver-haired *(Lasiurus noctivagans),* and hoary bats *(Lasiurus cinerus)*. Very little is known about these species, including definitive population sizes and where it is they migrate to.

Status: As of May 10, 2023, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has designated all three migratory species as 'Endangered'; adoption of this designation into the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* is currently pending.

Habitat: Alberta's migratory bats can be found in deciduous forests province-wide, including riparian cottonwood forests of the prairies. The cavities or under-bark of large decaying trees provide excellent sites for silver-haired and hoary bats to roost, while eastern red bats roost amongst the foliage of the canopy[3]. Rocky outcrops and crevices of coulee slopes are also used in treeless environments. All three species can be found foraging in open and insect-rich areas adjacent to their roosting sites, such as over wet meadows, hayfields, dugouts, and other sources of open water.

Threats: Like their feathered counterparts, migratory bats can cover considerable distances facing a myriad of threats along the way. Their need to migrate puts them at greater risk than resident species, which may remain in relatively stable environments year-round. While resident species may continue to use established roosts, the loss, fragmentation, and degradation of natural corridors may result in the loss of suitable roosting and foraging sites for bats on the move. Where these corridors still remain, new threats, such as wind energy development, have emerged. Wind turbines are purposefully placed in areas of strong wind currents, the same currents which migrant bats use to facilitate their nocturnal flights; this leaves migratory bats especially susceptible to fatal collisions. An estimated 11-19 individuals are killed per turbine each year in Canada, though it is important to note that by implementing appropriate mitigation measures this number can be significantly reduced. It is for this reason that the species are now considered 'Endangered', as without accurate population estimates or consistent use of best operating procedures at wind facilities, the impact of this growing industry to the future of these species remains uncertain.


Jason Headley

Alberta's migratory bats, including this hoary bat, depend on deciduous trees for roosting sites.

Species Profile: Alberta's Migratory Bats (continued)

Beneficial Management Practices for Bats

There are a number of beneficial management practices which you can implement to protect important roost and foraging areas and ease the pressure on our migrant bats, including:

Maintaining or Improving Foraging Habitat:

- Restoring or protecting wetlands/watercourses
- Maintaining riparian ecosystem health
- Using conservative utilization rates (25 - 65%)
- Placing salt/minerals away from natural water sources
- Allowing for long periods of rest in riparian zones

Providing Suitable Roosting Sites

- Retaining large dead standing trees (snags), if safe to do so
- Protecting existing trees from extensive beaver and livestock damage
- Planting native deciduous trees, especially balsam poplar and cottonwood, where they have been lost
- Setting up a bat house where trees are lacking in otherwise suitable areas
- Leaving abandoned/derelict buildings as potential roosting sites
- Limiting activity near roosts until bats have left (generally October to March)
- Avoiding the use of insecticides

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Alberta Conservation Association — Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

Alberta

Canadian Cattle Association

Alberta Beef Producers (Since 1969)

Prairie Conservation Forum

This project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada.
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Canada

CRSB — Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef / Table ronde canadienne sur le boeuf durable

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