

# 92ND ANNUAL MAFWA DIRECTORS' MEETING



## **BUILDING RESILIENCE:** Rewilding an Altered Landscape through Partnerships

**June 21-24, 2026**  
**Okoboji, Iowa**

# WELCOME

## Welcome to the 92<sup>nd</sup> Annual MAFWA Directors' Meeting

On behalf of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, we are absolutely thrilled to welcome our fellow conservation leaders, partners, and friends from across the Midwest and Canada to beautiful Lake Okoboji.

Iowa has always been a cradle for pioneering conservation minds. As you flip through this program, we invite you to walk in the footsteps of the native sons, daughters, and visionary leaders who called Iowa home and fundamentally shaped our global field. You are in the home state of Aldo Leopold, born in Burlington, who taught us the concept of "Land Ethic"; Congressman John F. Lacey of Oskaloosa, who authored the foundational Lacey Act of 1900; and J.N. "Ding" Darling, the legendary Sioux City and Des Moines cartoonist who turned his art into the Federal Duck Stamp program. Iowa is also where visionary botanists like Thomas MacBride and Dr. Louis Pammel established 38 of our state parks, paving the way for Pammel's brilliant mentee, Dr. Ada Hayden. As the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from Iowa State, Dr. Hayden tirelessly mapped and saved our remaining native tallgrass prairies. Their legacy is the very foundation of the work we all carry forward today.

As we gather here in the heart of the Midwest, we look out at a landscape that defines our shared regional identity. Iowa proudly feeds the world, but our agricultural productivity means we also manage one of the most altered landscapes on the planet, having faced significant historic losses of our native wetlands, grasslands, and forests. Balancing a thriving agricultural economy with the protection of our natural resources is a challenge we all share.

That is why this week's theme of Building Resilience: Rewilding an Altered Landscape through Partnerships is so vital. Right here in the Iowa Great Lakes watershed, you will see a living laboratory where over 50 years of collaborative "rewilding" has proven that ecological integrity and economic vitality are inextricably linked. Through myriad partnerships spanning state agencies, local fundraising, and private citizens, this region has implemented extensive land protection, shallow lake restoration, and urban conservation strategies. The long-term results of improved water clarity, decreased nutrient levels, and positive shifts in our aquatic plant life and fisheries stand as a testament to the power of collaborative conservation. We hope the Iowa Great Lakes experience offers a scalable model for your own jurisdictions, demonstrating how aggressive, partnership-driven conservation can restore natural function to our most premiere resources.

We hope the next few days of collaboration, storytelling, and hospitality inspire you. Thank you for your tireless dedication to our natural worlds, and again, welcome to Iowa!



Kayla Lyon  
Director, Iowa DNR



Pete Hildreth  
Conservation & Recreation Division Administrator, Iowa DNR

# ABOUT THE IOWA DNR



**Director**  
**Kayla Lyon**

**Deputy Director**  
**Alex Moon**

**CRD Administrator**  
**Pete Hildreth**

**ESD Administrator**  
**Amie Davidson**

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages fish and wildlife programs, ensures the health of Iowa's forests and prairies, and provides recreational opportunities in Iowa's state parks.

Just as importantly, the DNR carries out state and federal laws that protect air, land and water through technical assistance, permitting and compliance programs. The DNR also encourages the enjoyment and stewardship of natural resources among Iowans through outreach and education.

## **Mission**

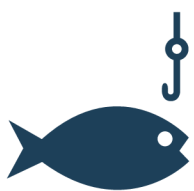
To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life in Iowa and ensure a legacy for future generations.

## **Vision**

Leading Iowans in caring for our natural resources.

## **Conservation and Recreation Division (CRD)**

### **Fisheries**



The Fisheries Bureau manages nearly 71,000 miles of streams and 300,000 acres of Iowa waters to improve fishing and recreational opportunities for more Iowans in more places. Iowa's fishing opportunities are as diverse as the species of fish you can catch. Seven state fish hatcheries produce and stock up to 150 million fish each year into Iowa waters. Most of the walleyes, muskellunge, trout, and channel catfish in our lakes began their life in DNR hatcheries.

The Community Fishing Program continues to grow and, since 2017, has established 118 new ponds totaling 300.4 acres of new public access and also assisted with the construction of new ponds within 30 communities in 14 counties. The Bureau is supported by a dedicated team of 86 full-time staff and 26 seasonal full-time equivalents (FTEs) who help ensure the success of these programs and manage Iowa's valuable aquatic resources.



## **Wildlife**

The Wildlife Bureau is Iowa's largest land management entity, managing 514 public wildlife management areas spanning 425,652 acres. About one-third of these acres are federal lands managed by the wildlife bureau under agreements with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Federal lands include more than 24,100 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas in the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa. Lands are managed by a dedicated staff of 81 biologists and technicians stationed at 23 locations across the state resulting in a management responsibility of 5,254 acres per permanent position.

The Wildlife Bureau's private lands program has 24 FTEs, consisting of wildlife biologists, foresters, and technicians that provide technical assistance and recommendations to private landowners. Their combined annual reach is impressive: working with 150 landowners to provide over 21,000 acres of walk-in hunting access, developing 623 wildlife habitat plans on 15,767 acres, 1,291 forestry plans on 25,028 acres, and working with 568 landowners enrolled in the deer depredation program who were allocated 9,742 depredation licenses resulting in the harvest of 3,113 deer.

Public engagement is a priority of every program within the wildlife bureau and the outreach achieved through those efforts is equally impressive. Annual highlights include 20 hunter listening sessions held in March with more than 600 members of the public in attendance as well as 20 public wildlife area good neighbor meetings where neighboring landowners are invited to learn about current and planned restoration and management activities on the wildlife areas as well as private land habitat restoration and enhancement cost share programs that they might be eligible for on their surrounding private lands.

## **Law Enforcement**



The Law Enforcement Bureau had an impactful year in 2025, demonstrating its commitment to public service and resource protection. Conservation officers made 198,755 public contacts, reflecting their active presence and engagement within the community. In addition, 104,820 individuals participated in programs presented by conservation officers, highlighting the bureau's dedication to education and outreach. The bureau also conducted 390 media outreach programs, using radio, television, print, and social media to further expand its reach.

Throughout the year, 9,702 violations were detected and documented through citations, warnings, and arrests, underscoring the officers' role in upholding state laws and regulations.

As of June 2026, the Law Enforcement Bureau is comprised of 91 members, including 69 Conservation Officers, 12 Conservation Officer Sergeants, 6 Captains, 1 Investigator, 1 Training Coordinator, 1 Program Specialist, and 1 Chief, with a total of 90 certified officers.

Over the past two years, the bureau has been actively involved in transitioning State Park Rangers into the role of State Conservation Officers. This process includes Conservation Officers taking on park enforcement responsibilities, aligning the skills and capabilities of DNR law enforcement with the evolving needs of the public. Seven Rangers were integrated in Fall 2024, followed by four more in Fall 2025, with approximately 20 rangers still awaiting integration. Officers undergoing this transition complete several months of hands-on academy training and a mentored field training program before serving independently. With many officers set to retire in the coming fiscal year, the pace of integration is expected to increase.



### **State Parks, Forests, and Preserves:**

The DNR manages 71 State Parks, Recreation Areas, and State Forest Campgrounds, totaling 101,973 acres and drawing an estimated 13.5 million visitors in 2025. These areas feature extensive infrastructure, including campsites, cabins, lodges, picnic shelters, trails, and amenities such as showers, restrooms, and boat access.

In 2025, the DNR completed 43 capital projects and designed an additional 96. Operational changes at six parks introduced 100% same-day reservations, improving customer experience and access. The Bureau also partnered with local groups to enhance accessibility by developing new programs and facilities that support inclusive outdoor recreation.



Iowa's state forest system, spanning over 46,000 acres across four large forests, is sustainably managed for forest products, wildlife habitat, soil and water protection, unique ecosystems, and recreation, serving as critical areas for bird conservation. In 2024, state forest staff completed over 600 acres of stand improvement, 60 acres of reforestation, 1,500 miles of trail maintenance, 900 acres of prescribed fire, 120 acres of prairie and savanna management, and 12 educational programs, while timber harvests exceeded 1,000,000 board feet. Urban Forestry reached 414 communities with technical or financial assistance and logged 18,077 volunteer hours in 2025. The Fire Program awarded nearly \$350,000 to 105 volunteer fire departments, and the State Nursery averaged \$1,070,000 in annual income with 4,100 orders and 973,000 seedlings sold. Entomology surveys in 2025 detected thousands of acres affected by forest pests and set thousands of monitoring traps. Forest Legacy funded six projects in four years, including the largest purchase of 1,769 acres and over 1,600 acres protected via conservation easements, with more underway. The Trees for Kids grant, since the early 1990s, has awarded \$156,000 in the last four years, funding the planting of 1,265 trees by more than 3,100 children and 548 adults.

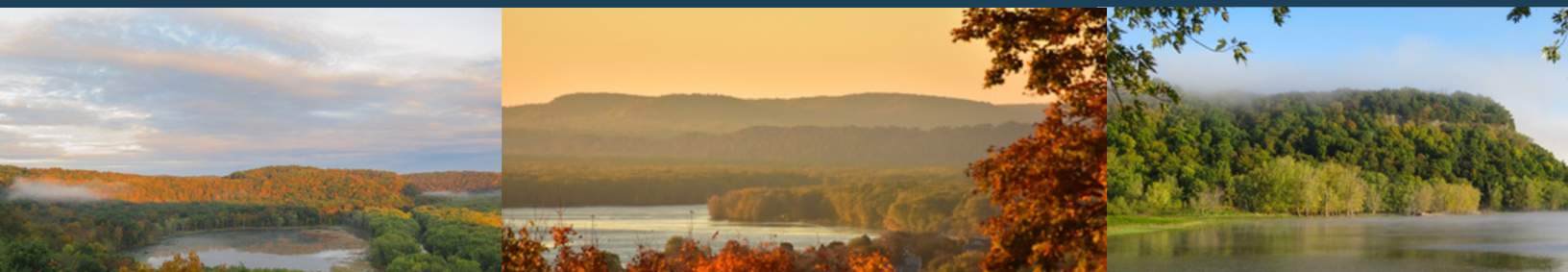
### **Land and Waters**



The Land and Waters Bureau, currently staffed with 27 full-time equivalents (FTEs), oversees capital improvement and resource restoration projects across multiple program areas that advance natural resource conservation goals.

The Public Land Acquisition and Management Program protects natural resources and expands outdoor recreation, having acquired 4,201 acres of land and conservation easements in 2025.

Meanwhile, the Rivers Program focuses on water trail outreach and safety, developing 1,247 miles of water trails and mitigating 36 hazardous dams since 2008. Supporting these efforts, the Engineering and Construction Services team directs infrastructure projects, designing and building 78 initiatives on public lands totaling \$21.5 million in 2025. Finally, the Lake Restoration Program improves water quality and public recreation by reducing algae and sedimentation, completing restoration work at 44 lakes, and enhancing over 14,400 acres of wetlands.



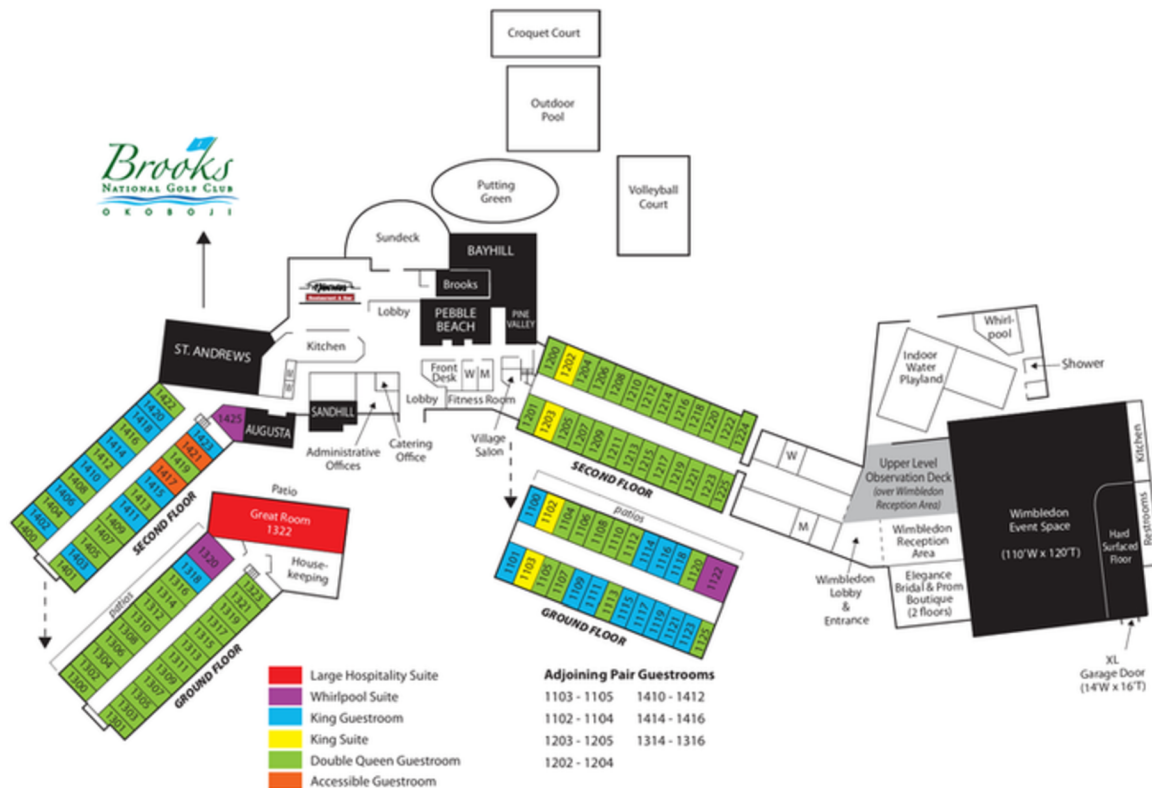
# Explore the Area



Tours & other activities to do in the area:

- Okoboji Classic Cars <https://okobojicc.com/>
- Maritime Museum <https://arnoldspark.com/maritime-museum/>
- Iowa Rock-n-Roll Hall of Fame <https://www.iowarocknroll.com/>
- Arnold's Park <https://arnoldspark.com/>
- Winchester Museum <https://thewinchesterstore.com/>
- Sherwood Forest <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Dickinson/Park/Sherwood-Forest>
- Fisherman's Factory Outlet <https://www.purefishing.com/>
- Freda Haffner Kettlehole State Preserve <https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/freda-haffner-preserve/>

# Resort & Conference Center Map



# MAFWA PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

Hi Friends,

It has been a whirlwind of a year with many changes for MAFWA. You all stepped up to the plate when I needed you during this transition year and I truly appreciate it. I called you together so often that a month rarely went by when I didn't see all of you or most of you. Our team of directors and staff is amazing, dedicated, and as purely Midwestern as they come! A big shoutout to Tricia for standing in as the Executive Secretary while we worked to revamp and rebuild parts and pieces of MAFWA that desperately needed it.

One of the big accomplishments I want to highlight this year is the hiring of a new Executive Secretary, Stephanie Daniel. Thanks to those who served on the hiring team and spent hours away from their "normal" busy jobs to help us find the right person. It was well worth it! We also succeeded in initiating and completing, for the first time, performance reviews for our staff. I felt strongly about doing this to show our staff how valued they are by the MAFWA board and to celebrate all the work they completed. We tackled technology upgrades with Pete leading a team to revamp our website, the board approving and initiating travel cards for staff, obtaining a cell phone and new computer for the executive secretary, and Tricia setting up and creating MAFWA email addresses for all our staff! We had an unprecedented opportunity to provide MAFWA's top priorities to the Fish and Wildlife Service in an effort to initiate real change in our partnership work with them for years to come. Perhaps the biggest triage occurred when we lost federal grant funding for MLI and had to rework our state assessments which included discussion on using some of our pennies in the storehouse. This challenge became an opportunity to really discuss our priorities and what matters most to MAFWA. Thanks to all of you for asking the hard questions and paving a path forward.

I hope the above and beyond work you put in this year has greased the skids for the next 20 years of fantastic conservation work by MAFWA. Enjoy your week in the great state of Iowa with your conservation colleagues, but most of all, take time to reflect and breathe a little easier knowing all that you've accomplished this year.

With deep gratitude,



Shannon Lott, Director  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources



# Agenda



## **BUILDING RESILIENCE:** **Rewilding an Altered Landscape through Partnerships**

2026 MAFWA Directors' Meeting  
Lake Okoboji Resort & Conference Center  
June 21-24, 2026

### **Remarks from Interim MAFWA Executive Secretary**

Stepping into the role of Acting Executive Secretary gave me a valuable opportunity to learn the inner workings of this organization. Those early weeks were filled with important housekeeping items: updating our website with the website committee, creating our email domain, setting up a credit card, and working to address increases in state assessments. More importantly, the experience gave me a front-row seat to see how MAFWA influences policy, strengthens partnerships, and advances conservation and management. We have the foundation, the commitment, and the dedication of everyone in this room, and together, that positions us to keep elevating our influence, demonstrating that the MAFWA community is ready to lead, support our stakeholders, expand our relevance, and conserve our natural resources. Thank you for the opportunity; now let's get back to work!



**Tricia Fry**

## **Sunday, June 21, 2026**

**02:00 - 06:00 PM**

### **Meeting Registration Open & Vendor Set-Up**

Location: Hotel Lobby & Pebble Beach North

**04:00 - 06:00 PM**

### **MAFWA Executive Committee Meeting**

Location: Sandhill

**06:30 - 08:30 PM**

### **Welcome Reception**

Location: Bayhill  
*Sponsored by: Brandt Information Services*

**08:30 - 11:00 PM**

### **Hospitality Suite Open**

Location: Great Room  
*Sponsored by: Southwick Associates*

# Monday, June 22, 2026

07:00 AM - 04:00 PM

## Meeting Registration Open

Location: Sandhill

07:00 - 08:00 AM

## Attendee Breakfast

Location: Bayhill

*Sponsored by: National Wild Turkey Federation*

08:00 - 09:00 AM

## Welcome to Iowa / Keynote

Location: St. Andrews

- Posting of the Colors - Iowa DNR Law Enforcement Honor Guard
- Welcome to Iowa – Pete Hildreth, Iowa DNR Division Administrator
- Building Resilience: Rewilding an Altered Landscape through Partnerships - Mike Hawkins, Iowa DNR Fisheries

09:00 - 10:00 AM

## State Hot Topics

Location: St. Andrews

*Moderated by: Shannon Lott, MAFWA President*

10:00 - 10:30 AM

## Refreshment Break

Location: Pebble Beach North

*Sponsored by: DJ Case & Associates*

10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

## State Hot Topics Continued

Location: St. Andrews

12:00 - 01:30 PM

## Awards Luncheon

Location: Bayhill

*Co-Sponsored by: Canadian NAWMP Partners & Fall Flights*

*Co-Sponsored by: Ducks Unlimited*

- Awards presented by: MAFWA Awards Committee – Pete Hildreth, Iowa DNR Division Administrator
- Awards presented by: AMFGLEO Awards Committee – Jed Whitchurch, Illinois DNR, Director of Law Enforcement

01:30 - 02:15 PM

## State Hot Topics Continued

Location: St. Andrews

02:15 - 02:30 PM

## AFWA Report

Location: St. Andrews

*Presented by: Ron Regan, AFWA Executive Director*

02:30 - 02:45 PM

### **Fall Flights**

Location: St. Andrews  
*Presented by: Andy Readeke, AFWA*

02:45 - 03:00 PM

### **Refreshment Break**

Location: Pebble Beach North  
*Sponsored by: Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation*

03:00 - 04:00 PM

### **MAFWA Federal Partners**

Location: St. Andrews

- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

04:00 - 04:45 PM

### **USFWS & MAFWA Priorities**

Location: St. Andrews  
*Moderated by: Lorisa Smith*

05:00 - 06:00 PM

### **Attendee Dinner**

Location: Bayhill  
*Sponsored by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

06:30 - 09:00 PM

### **Queen II Lake Okoboji Boat Tour & Dessert**

Location: Arnolds Park (Off-Site)  
*Co-Sponsored by: Guardian Fleet Safety*  
*Co-Sponsored by: Pay It Outdoors*

09:30 - 11:00 PM

### **Hospitality Suite Open**

Great Room  
*Sponsored by: Pay It Outdoors*

## **Tuesday, June 23, 2026**

07:00 AM - 05:00 PM

### **Meeting Registration Open**

Location: Sandhill  
7:00 AM to 2:00 PM - By Phone (515) 238-4968  
2:00 to 5:00 PM - On-Site

07:00 - 0815 AM

### **Attendee Breakfast**

Location: Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery (Off-Site)  
*Sponsored by: National Archery in the Schools Program*

- Buses load and depart for the hatchery at 7:00 AM
- Group A: Breakfast & Hatchery Tour
- Group B: Hatchery Tour & Breakfast

**08:15 AM - 12:00 PM**

### **Field Tour - Midwest Resilience**

Location: Field Sites

- Anglers Bay
- Moore Slough
- Shallow Lakes Initiative - West Hottes Lake/Kettleson Hogsback Complex
- West Okoboji Complex WMA/WPA and Okoboji View Golf Course

Refreshment Break

*Sponsored by: Karl Emergency Vehicles*

**12:00 - 01:00 PM**

### **Attendee Lunch**

Location: Maser Monarch Lodge (Off-Site)

*Sponsored by: Bass Pro Shops*

**01:00 - 01:15 PM**

### **Iowa's County Conservation Board System**

Location: Maser Monarch Lodge (Off-Site)

*Presented by: Lee Sorenson, Dickinson CCB Director*

**01:15 - 02:00 PM**

### **MAFWA Technical Working Committee Reports**

Location: Maser Monarch Lodge (Off-Site)

- Private Lands
- Public Lands
- F&G Law Enforcement Officers
- Deer
- Wild Turkey
- Furbearer
- Wildlife Diversity
- Conservation Social Science/Human Dimensions
- Feral Swine

**02:00 - 05:00 PM**

### **MAFWA Executive Session**

Location: Maser Monarch Lodge (Off-Site)

Closed Session - Invitation Only

Non-Directors return to hotel

Dinner on your own

**08:00 - 11:00 PM**

### **Hospitality Suite**

Location: Great Room

*Sponsored by: Safari Club International*

# Wednesday, June 24, 2026

07:00 - 09:00 AM

## Meeting Registration Open

Location: Sandhill

07:00 - 08:00 AM

## Attendee Breakfast

Location: Bay Hill

*Sponsored by: National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF)*

08:00 AM - 12:00 PM

## MAFWA Business Meeting

Location: St. Andrews

*Facilitated by: Shannon Lott, MAFWA President*

- Call to Order
- Agenda Review
- Approval of 2025 Previous Meeting Board Minutes
- Treasurer's Report – Roger Luebbert (MAFWA)
- Executive Secretary's Report and Fish & Wildlife Health Coordinator Report – Tricia Fry (MAFWA)
- R3 & Relevancy Coordinator Report – Keith Warnke (MAFWA)
- MLI – Tim McCoy (NE)
- Budget and Finance Committee Report – Shannon Lott (MI)
- Audit Committee Report – Chris Kennedy (KS)
- Bylaws Committee Report – Tim McCoy (NE)
- Resolutions Committee Report – Jeb Williams (ND)
- Awards Committee Report – Kendra Wecker (OH)
- Conservation Fund Board of Trustees – Jason Sumner (MO)
- CEF/MFWS Committee – Tim McCoy (NE)
- Old Business
- New Business
- Presentation of Past President's Plaque
- Kansas Spotlight (2027)

10:00 - 10:30 AM

## Refreshment Break

Location: Pebble Beach North

*Sponsored by: The Wildlife Society*

12:00 PM

## Conference Adjourns

Lunch on your own

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