

# **Building Strong Collaborative Relationships for a Sustainable Water Resources Future:**

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**

SUMMARY OF STATE WATER PLANNING

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December 2009

The findings contained in this report are based on the information collected from the literature search and interviews for this initiative and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy or decision unless so designated by other official documentation.

# STATE OF WISCONSIN

## 1. STATE/REGIONAL WATER PLANNING STATUS

Wisconsin does not currently have a statewide comprehensive water resources plan. Water resources' planning is conducted primarily at the regional level through Integrated Basin Plans (a.k.a. Watershed Planning) and at the local level through the "Smart Growth Law." At the regional level, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in partnership with local watershed groups and stakeholders, developed Integrated Basin Plans for each of 23 Geographic Management Units (GMUs) between 1999 and 2002. Each of these plans describes the current state of the basin, highlights the issues and threats to the health of the basin, and summarizes future objectives to help guide work plans for DNR and its local partners. In 2009, Wisconsin revamped its Water Quality Planning Program to provide updates on a continuous basis at the watershed level (12-digit HUC) versus periodic updates at the Basin or 8-digit HUC level. The first year of the new planning cycle occurs in 2009 to 2010.

At the local level, water resources planning is conducted through the "Smart Growth Law" (s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats.), which was passed in 1999 and requires each community in the state to develop a local Comprehensive Plan by 2010 to guide future community planning and decisions. Each Comprehensive Plan must contain nine elements, two of which pertain to water resources: Utilities and Community Facilities Element, and Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Element. Each element includes an inventory of existing resources, the issues and problems affecting the resource, an implementation plan that includes specific actions to address these issues, and a schedule for re-evaluation and revision of the plan.

The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP), which is authorized under Section 309 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, addresses issues related to Wisconsin's impact on the Great Lakes. In 2007, WCMP released A Strategic Vision for the Great Lakes to identify existing issues and threats, and provide guidance for local, regional and state organizations to address these issues. In addition to the WCMP, DNR's Office of the Great Lakes, working with partners in the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan basins, has developed a Restoration and Protection Strategy specific to Wisconsin, which was originally drafted in 2006 and is currently being updated. This strategy addresses eight priority issues identified by the Council of Great Lakes Governors and they are the priorities used in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, a basinwide prioritization of restoration and protection activities for the Great Lakes.

## 2. RESPONSIBLE STATE AGENCIES/REGIONAL ENTITIES

The Water Division of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for protecting and managing the water resources of the state. The Water Division is comprised of three bureaus:

- Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau
- Fisheries Management Bureau
- Watershed Management Bureau

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### 3. WATER MANAGEMENT VISION AND GOALS

All waters in Wisconsin are held in trust for its citizens through Article IX of the Wisconsin Constitution, known as the Public Trust Doctrine. This Doctrine was intended to ensure that “All citizens have the right to enjoy recreation, fishing, hunting, clean water, and the scenic beauty of our waterways” (Source [1]).

The mission of DNR is (Source [2]):

*To protect and enhance our natural resources: our air, land and water; our wildlife, fish and forests and the ecosystems that sustain all life.*

*To provide a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities.*

*To ensure the right of all people to use and enjoy these resources in their work and leisure.*

*To work with people to understand each other's views and to carry out the public will.  
 And in this partnership consider the future and generations to follow.*

The four main objectives of DNR’s Water Division are (Source [1]):

- Protecting the waters of Wisconsin that are held in trust for all people of the state through the Public Trust Doctrine.
- Fully Implementing the Clean Water Act in order to achieve the goal of fishable and swimmable waters throughout Wisconsin.
- Protecting drinking water and groundwater resources for both human and ecosystem health.
- Enhancing and restoring outstanding fisheries in Wisconsin’s waters.

The overall goal of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP), which is part of the Department of Administration’s Division of Intergovernmental Relations, is (Source [8]):

*To preserve, protect, develop and where possible, to restore or enhance, the resources of Wisconsin's coastal area for this and succeeding generations, with governmental coordination and public involvement, giving due consideration to the linkages and impacts to resources of inland areas.*

To achieve this goal, there are five primary objectives of the WCMP (Source [8]):

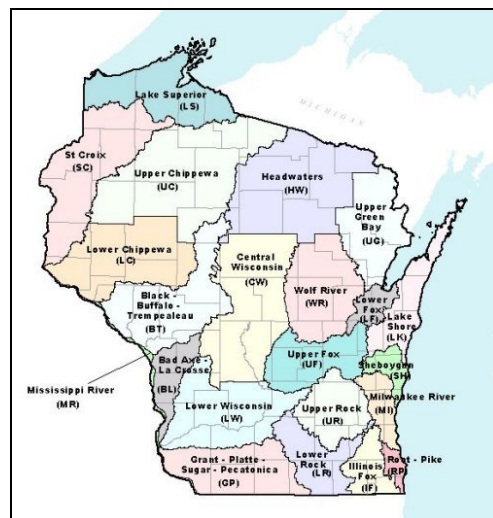
- *To improve the implementation and enforcement of existing state regulatory and management policies and programs affecting key coastal uses and areas;*
- *To improve the coordination of existing policies and activities of governmental units and planning agencies on matters affecting key coastal uses and areas;*
- *To strengthen local governmental capabilities to initiate and continue effective coastal management consistent with identified state standards and criteria;*
- *To provide a strong voice to advocate the wise and balanced use of the coastal environment and the recognition in federal, state, and local policies of the uniqueness of the coastal environment; and*
- *To increase public awareness and opportunity for citizens to participate in decisions affecting the Great Lakes resources.*

#### 4. SCOPE OF WATER RESOURCES PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

##### Integrated Basin Plans

Water resource planning is conducted at the watershed scale by DNR Water Division's Watershed Management Bureau. Since the 1970's Wisconsin has implemented a series of basin-level planning programs. The current program is based on a nested watershed planning approach; 330 watersheds in the state, comprising 23 Geographic Management Units (GMUs), will be updated over a period of 5 to 10 years.

GMUs are delineated along both hydrologic and political boundaries to facilitate the planning process (Figure 1). Between 1999 and 2002, DNR in conjunction with local stakeholders and communities developed an Integrated Basin Plan for each GMU. Through basin partnerships, planning agencies involved in Smart Growth work were involved in "GMU" basin teams that helped identify basin priorities for the planning process. Integrated Basin Plans, also known as State of the Basin Reports, were "designed to capture the essence of popularly discussed holistic, systems-based planning approaches" (Source [6]).



**Figure 1. Geographic Management Units (Source: [5])**

Although they vary in format and scope, each Integrated Basin Plan generally provided:

- An inventory of existing resources in each basin
- Past and on-going management programs
- Potential issues and threats to basin health
- A set of goals needed to resolve these issues and achieve a shared vision of the basin.

Each plan was developed through a partnership between DNR staff and local stakeholders. The plans provide a guide for DNR staff and local partners to develop work plans in each basin that

will achieve the vision and goals of the basin plan. They were originally intended to be updated every six years, but no updates have been made since the initial development between 1999 and 2002. Due to resource constraints, the scope of the planning process has been revised to focus primarily on watershed issues. The first in a series of updates to the state's WQM Plans – at a watershed scale (12-digit HUC) -- will take place in 2009 to 2010. These updates will fulfill the state's Clean Water Act WQM Planning obligations. One-to-three watershed per "GMU" will be updated each year, providing a 5-to-10 year statewide plan update schedule.

The Integrated Basin Plans replaced Areawide Water Quality Management Plans that were developed in the early 1990's. The basin plans generally adopt an ecosystem-based management approach that includes land-based resource issues, such as forestry and wildlife management, in addition to water resource issues such as water supply, water quality, and aquatic habitat.

### **Groundwater and Source Water Protection**

In addition to the Integrated Basin Plans, the DNR Division of Water is also involved in other planning-related programs such as wellhead protection, water quality assessments, floodplain mapping and management, statewide monitoring programs, and wetlands mapping. These programs provide information to aid the local and regional planning efforts described above.

With over 75 percent of Wisconsin's drinking water supplied from groundwater, wellhead protection plans are important planning tools designed to protect the quality of groundwater used for drinking water. DNR oversees the wellhead protection program, which was mandated through the 1986 amendments to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The wellhead protection program is "designed to protect community water supply wells from contamination" and is "required for all municipal wells installed after May 1, 1992" (Source [11]). In addition, the 1996 amendments to the SDWA required the state to develop source water assessments for all public water supplies, which include "a delineation of the land area that contributes water to a municipal well or surface water system intake, locations of potential contamination sources within the source water areas, and a determination of each system's susceptibility to contamination" (Source [11]). The Wisconsin Source Water Assessment Program Plan was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1999, and all source water assessments were completed by DNR by 2004. Source water protection planning is similar to wellhead protection planning for groundwater-supplied utilities but also includes protection planning for surface water-supplied drinking water systems and is carried out in cooperation with several other agencies. DNR recommends that both the wellhead/source water protection plans and source water assessments be integrated into the Comprehensive Plans of each community.

### **Water Quality**

In addition to the SDWA, DNR is responsible for implementing the requirements of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), which focuses on protecting water quality and ensuring that state waters meet designated uses. The most recent Water Quality Assessment or Water Quality Report to Congress, submitted by DNR to Congress in 2006 in fulfillment of Section 305(b) of the CWA, describes water quality conditions throughout the state, which are based on a statewide monitoring program run by DNR in addition to data collected by other state and federal agencies, and volunteer-based watershed monitoring groups. The assessment also

describes the existing programs and initiatives implemented by the state to improve water quality and reduce impairments.

### **Great Lakes Restoration and Protection**

With over 6.5 million acres of Wisconsin land draining into Lakes Michigan and Superior, the governor of Wisconsin established the Office of the Great Lakes (OGL) in 2004 to address issues related to the Great Lakes such as (Source [7]):

- Water diversions,
- Exotic species introductions through ballast water exchange,
- Contaminated sediment sites,
- Nonpoint source impacts like loss of habitat or nutrient enrichment induced algae problems,
- Beach safety, and
- Habitat and species restoration.

OGL's responsibilities include (Source [7]):

- Supporting the DNR role in the Great Lakes Commission, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, and the International Joint Commission.
- Coordinating with state and federal agency Great Lakes programs such as the Dept. of Administration Coastal Zone Management, University of Wisconsin Sea Grant, and University of Wisconsin Extension, and US Geological Survey.
- Working with non-governmental organizations to protect the Great Lakes.
- Developing Lake Michigan and Lake Superior restoration and protection action agendas.
- Managing Great Lakes project funding.

The OGL has developed the Wisconsin Great Lakes Restoration and Protection Strategy (WGLRPS), which is currently being updated. The WGLRPS is intended to provide specific strategies to address eight priority issues defined by the Council of Great Lakes Governors (Source [12]). The priority issues include:

- Aquatic Invasive Species
- Habitat and Species
- Coastal Health
- Areas of Concern/Contaminated Sediments
- Nonpoint Source Management
- Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxins (PBT)
- Sustainable Development
- Information and Indicators

For each priority issue, the WGLRPS includes a problem statement as the issues relates to Wisconsin, a set of goals, and recommended actions. There are four goals of the overall strategy, including (Source [12]):

- The strategy will translate the recommendations from the regional collaboration into Wisconsin-specific actions.

- The strategy will be a vehicle for coordinating efforts and developing shared priorities.
- The strategy will serve as a menu for securing and allocating resources.
- The strategy will promote developing projects to be ready for implementation and better position Wisconsin for competing for federal restoration and protection funding.

In addition to DNR's OGL, Great Lakes issues are also addressed by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP), which is part of the Department of Administration's Division of Intergovernmental Relations. WCMP is authorized by Section 309 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, and receives funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In 2007, WCMP released A Strategic Vision for the Great Lakes, which describes the current coastal issues and policies, and an implementation plan to achieve their goal: "To preserve, protect, develop and where possible, to restore or enhance, the resources of Wisconsin's coastal area for this and succeeding generations, with governmental coordination and public involvement, giving due consideration to the linkages and impacts to resources of inland areas" (Source [8]).

The Strategic Vision focuses on seven issues, including:

- Coastal water quality and quantity and air quality
- Coastal natural areas, wildlife habitat, and fisheries
- Erosion and flood hazard areas
- Community development
- Economic development
- Governmental interrelationships
- Public involvement

For each section, the Strategic Vision plan describes the issues and problems, relevant policies, and specific actions necessary to resolve the issues. In addition to the regional coastal planning, WCMP supports local planning efforts through A Guide to Planning for Coastal Communities in Wisconsin (Source [9]), which was released in 2004 and provides guidance for local communities on how to include coastal issues in the nine Comprehensive Plan elements.

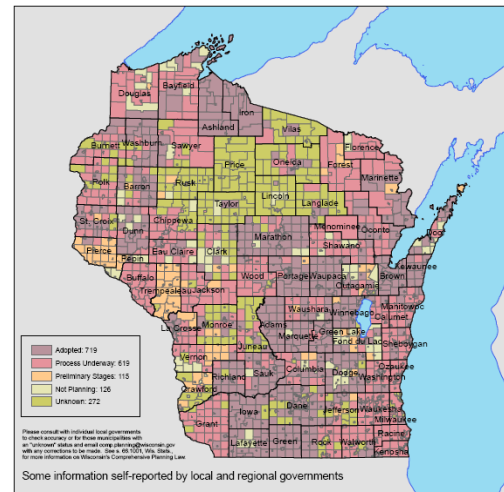


## Community Comprehensive Planning

In addition to the Basin Plans and other regional planning initiatives, water resources planning in Wisconsin is also conducted at the local community level through the Comprehensive Planning Law (Section 66.1001, Wis. Stats.), which is also known as the “Smart Growth Law” This law was passed in 1999 and requires each community in the state to develop a comprehensive plan by 2010 to serve as a guide for future community planning and decisions. The purpose of this law is not to “mandate how a community should grow, rather it requires public participation at the local level in deciding how a community wants to look and be in the future” [3]. Once the plan has been finalized, “if a city, village, town, or county engages in zoning, shoreland/wetland zoning, subdivision mapping, or official mapping those actions shall be consistent with that local governmental unit’s comprehensive plan” (Source [10]). As of April 2008, comprehensive plans have been adopted by 740 local governments, with an addition 660 plans under development and 120 local governments with unknown status or just beginning the planning process (Figure 2) (Source [10]). To assist local governments with the planning process, the state provides \$2 million of annual funding through the Comprehensive Plan Grant Program.

Each comprehensive plan must be comprised of the following nine elements (Source [3]):

- **Issues and Opportunities Element** – Background information on the local governmental unit and a statement of overall objectives, policies, goals and programs of the local governmental unit to guide the future development and redevelopment of the local governmental unit over a 20–year planning period.
- **Housing Element** – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs of the local governmental unit to provide an adequate housing supply that meets existing and forecasted housing demand in the local governmental unit.
- **Transportation Element** – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development of the various modes of transportation, including highways, transit, transportation systems for persons with disabilities, bicycles, electric personal assistive mobility devices, walking, railroads, air transportation, trucking and water transportation.
- **Utilities and Community Facilities Element** – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development of utilities and community facilities in the local governmental unit such as sanitary sewer service, storm water management, water supply, solid waste disposal, on–site wastewater treatment technologies, recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, power–generating plants and transmission lines, cemeteries, health care facilities, child care facilities and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue facilities, libraries, schools and other governmental facilities.



**Figure 2. Comprehensive Plan Status** (Source: [10])

- Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Element – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for the conservation, and promotion of the effective management, of natural resources such as groundwater, forests, productive agricultural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources consistent with zoning limitations under s. 295.20 (2), parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources and other natural resources.
- Economic Development Element – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to promote the stabilization, retention or expansion, of the economic base and quality employment opportunities in the local governmental unit, including an analysis of the labor force and economic base of the local governmental unit.
- Intergovernmental Cooperation Element – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions, including school districts and adjacent local governmental units, for siting and building public facilities and sharing public services.
- Land-Use Element – A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs to guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property.
- Implementation Element – A compilation of programs and specific actions to be completed in a stated sequence, including proposed changes to any applicable zoning ordinances, official maps, or subdivision ordinances, to implement the objectives, policies, plans and programs contained in [the elements listed above].

For each element (except the Issues and Opportunities and the Utilities and Community Facilities Elements), the Wisconsin Department of Administration's Division of Intergovernmental Relations in collaboration with stakeholders and other state agencies developed a guidebook to assist communities in developing their plan. Planning for water resources is primarily covered by the Utilities and Community Facilities and the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Elements, although each of the other seven elements also has some impact on water resources. In 2002, the Department of Urban & Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension and the Wisconsin DNR published the guidebook for the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources Element entitled *Planning for Natural Resources: A Guide to Including Natural Resources in Local Comprehensive Planning* (Source [4]). This guide provides information on the natural resources planning process including:

- Natural Resources Inventory
- Natural Resources Analysis
- Goals, Policies and Objectives for Natural Resources
- Implementation Programs and Actions
- Evaluation and Revision

The Natural Resources Planning Guide also describes the various types of natural resources that should be considered in each comprehensive plan. The water resources section of this guide describes the following types of water resources:

- Navigable Waters
- Floodplains
- Shorelands

- Wetlands
- Groundwater
- Water Supply
- Stormwater Runoff, Erosion, & Nonpoint Source Pollution

For each type of resource, the guide provides (Source [4]):

- An overview of specific natural resources and some of the issues and concerns related to those resources
- An overview of state and federal laws and programs that apply to some of those resources and can influence local comprehensive planning efforts
- Programs and actions to help local communities conserve and promote the effective management of natural resources found in their community.

There is currently no guidebook for the Utilities and Community Facilities Element. This element contains issues related to water and wastewater utilities and infrastructure. It includes not only an assessment of current needs, but also a projection of future needs based on population trends and projections. The element must “describe the location, use, and capacity of existing water supply systems and provide an assessment and timetable for new water supply facilities or needed improvements to existing facilities” (Source [11]).

The Implementation Element of the comprehensive plan includes the programs and specific actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of the other eight elements. It must also include a plan for monitoring progress towards achieving these goals and a mechanism for periodic re-evaluation of the plan that would result in updates as needed.

## **5. PARTNERSHIPS, STAKEHOLDER, AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Water resources planning in Wisconsin involves partnerships between local, regional, state and federal agencies and organizations. The Integrated Basin Plans were each developed through a partnership between DNR staff and the local stakeholders in each basin. Implementation of the basin plans is also shared between DNR and local organizations.

The Smart Growth Law requires that all community Comprehensive Plans must “be developed through a public process that includes public participation and a public hearing before adoption” [10]. The law also “emphasizes intergovernmental cooperation” between state agencies and local governments.

As part of its statewide monitoring program, DNR depends on partnerships with citizen-based volunteer monitoring programs, other state agencies, and the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

Planning and management in the Great Lakes involves partnerships between state, federal and regional entities. The DNR Water Division and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program work with regional organizations including the Great Lakes Commission, the Council of Great Lakes

Governors, and the International Joint Commission, as well as state agencies, and federal agencies, including NOAA, EPA, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## **6. OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

There is no single outcomes assessment process for the various planning initiatives described above. The Implementation Element of the community Comprehensive Plans is required to include a local monitoring program for assessing goals and objectives and providing information for periodic re-evaluation of the plan by the community. The Integrated Basin Plans were originally intended to undergo a six-year revision cycle, although no updates have been made since the original plans were developed between 1999 and 2002. The plans also do not define a specific monitoring strategy or assessment process. The WDNR strives to coordinate its comprehensive monitoring strategy with its water quality management planning program. A tiered approach to monitoring based on resource questions to be addressed provides statewide, regional and local or water-specific assessment information. These data are used in updating water assessments for rivers/streams, lakes, wetlands, and Great Lakes.

The Coastal Management Program is assessed through periodic progress reports that are required by Section 309 of the Coastal Zone Management Act. Similarly, DNR is required to periodically submit an integrated water quality assessment to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through Section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act.

In addition to the water quality assessment report, DNR also publishes a progress report that encompasses all water resources issues, including both quantity and quality, throughout the state called The Waters of Wisconsin, or Water Program Annual Report (Source [1]). This report provides a summary of the projects and accomplishments of DNR's Water Division. It does not, however, provide information about future efforts of the Water Division.

## **7. NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL PRIORITIES – INTERVIEW INSIGHTS**

Unfortunately, lack of funding has led to a reduction in water resources planning in Wisconsin. Previously, the state had multiple regional planners coordinating planning between the state, county and local governments, but resource constraints have forced the state to eliminate these positions. In order to meet federal and state requirements for water planning and management, DNR has had to rely on supervisors and water quality biologists to conduct planning activities which were previously conducted by full-time, permanent water quality planners. Overall, the state needs more funding in order for them to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act and other state and federal regulations.

Some of the major planning challenges discussed during the interview include continued development and training of staff for the statewide data systems, providing the resources to address large-scale emerging issues, such as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), addressing the impact of climate change on water levels in the Great Lakes and potential impacts on inland coldwater fisheries and ephemeral streams and wetlands, and addressing invasive species in the Great Lakes and inland waters. For nearly every issue, the state cited insufficient staff and funds to adequately address the challenges they face. The impaired waters program was

cited as an example of where workload and regulatory demand far outweighed available resources to implement the program.

Wisconsin has had positive results collaborating with nearby states and provinces, especially with regard to Great Lakes and Mississippi River issues, but also for inland waters. The St. Croix River is a good example of interstate collaboration between Wisconsin and Minnesota, but the states have run into challenges with coordination of grant proposals and other types of funding issues. The Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) was mentioned as being a good facilitator for interstate collaboration.

The state has also received positive support from the EPA, but mentioned that budget shortfalls at all levels of government, and complex (and changing) reporting requirements and measures places additional work burden upon the state. While one part of the EPA may approve a state activity, another may not. The state would like greater internal consistency within the USEPA and more flexibility in reporting regulatory progress, such as reducing the number of measures the state must track and assess. In addition, the state would like a greater role in setting the priorities for funding implementation of Great Lakes restoration and management program with federal agencies.

Other planning activities in the state include the County Land and Water Plans (CLWPs), and the Sewer Service Area Plans (SSAPs). The CLWPs are state-funded through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and include elements to help design implementation strategies that address non-point source problems. While DNR has been involved with these plans in the past, the level of participation will be reduced over time as state-mandated workload reductions are implemented. Facility plans are required for municipal wastewater treatment plants and SSA plans for communities with more than 10,000 residents. The primary issues involve aging infrastructure, which requires large-scale funding and major investments from all levels of government.

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