

**MOUNTAIN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

HOME OF THE YOUGHIOGHENY RIVERKEEPER

# SUMMER NEWSLETTER

PROTECTING, PRESERVING, AND RESTORING THE INDIAN CREEK  
AND GREATER YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER WATERSHEDS



Photo: Eric Harder

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

MWA is engaged in the creation of its next Strategic Plan. The purpose of this plan is to define the organization's key priorities for the next 3 to 5 years. As an MWA member or community stakeholder, your opinions can help to identify these key priorities. All of your responses will remain CONFIDENTIAL and will only be reported in summary form. The survey requires only 15 minutes of your time, but the value of your participation is immense. If you experience any difficulty in completing this survey, please contact The Hill Group, Inc. Survey Support Team at 412-722-1111. Thank you for your participation!



## WHAT ISSUES IN THE UPPER YOUGH WATERSHED ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Community participation is an integral part of the River Conservation Planning Process as the final plan contains management recommendations to achieve the vision that has been set forth through the development of the plan. Community members are encouraged to participate through community public meetings, public surveys, advisory committee roles, key individual interviews, and social media polls and questions.



## SEND US YOUR PICTURES OF THE YOUGH

We are always looking to feature our supporters' photos in the annual Lottery Calendar as well as presentations, newsletters, and educational materials.

We are specifically seeking high quality photos of water, plants, animals, and landscape located within Indian Creek and other tributaries of the Youghiogheny River.

Do you have any photos taken in the Youghiogheny River watershed that you would like to share with us?

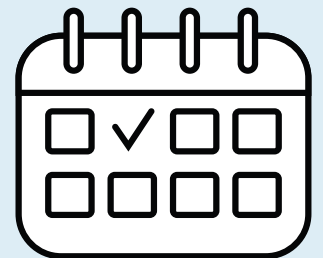
Send pictures to [Hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:Hannah@mtwatershed.com)



Photo: Ashley Shuster



Photo: Sara Wike



## SAVE THE DATE!

A list of upcoming events is included in the back of this newsletter. Go ahead and pencil us into your calendar! We'd love to see you at an event.

For more information visit the Events page on our website:  
[www.mtwatershed.com](http://www.mtwatershed.com)

# CAMPAIGNS

## MWA TESTS NURDLE PATROL AGAINST RECENT SPILL

When a train carrying sweet crude oil collided with a construction truck carrying stone on May 26 in Allegheny County, nine rail cars plunged into the river. One tanker cracked and leaked an estimated 3,000 gallons of crude into Guy Run, a few hundred feet from the Allegheny River. But the train line was stocked with more than fuel. Alongside liquid tankers were “buffer cars” filled with nurdles - small plastic pellets which are used as the building blocks for most manufactured plastic items. MWA and 3-Rivers Waterkeeper teamed up to test our nurdle sampling protocol against a spill of this size.

As we coasted up the Allegheny River toward the site, we noticed clusters of plastic eerily reminiscent of frog eggs gleaming along the floating booms set out by EPA cleanup agents. In some locations behind the booms, it looked as if it had snowed. The pipers, turtles and squirrels we saw plucking along the water line may have already started ingesting the plastic. In our two years of regular nurdle sampling, we hadn't seen anything quite like it.

We began our rigorous nurdle sampling program in Fall 2020 to assess existing plastic pollution in our rivers because Shell's Beaver County Ethane-Cracker Plant is expected to come online as early as Summer or Fall of 2022. This facility's chief output will be nurdles produced from fracked gas, which will then primarily be used to produce single-use plastics. The plant will instantly become the largest of its kind on the continent. Nurdles will likely be transported by rail car or barged and, based on the experiences of other groups near these facilities, nurdles will end up in waterways we depend on.

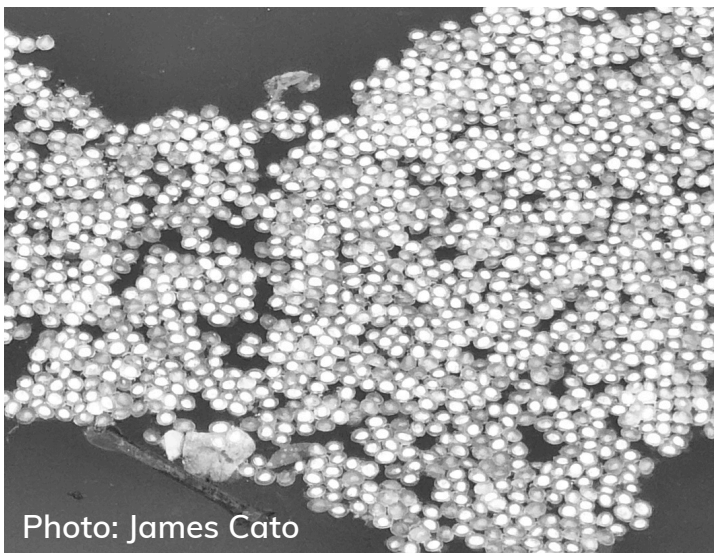


Photo: James Cato

**Nurdles are tiny plastic pellets used as the building block for most single-use plastic products we use, from grocery bags to drink cups.**

### Why would this matter?

1. Nurdles grow more harmful the longer they remain in rivers – at times concentrating toxins a million times more than in the water.
2. As a polymer, they do not biodegrade. They may enter and re-enter the watershed many times.
3. Many nurdles resemble fish, frog, or insect eggs. Birds, turtles, and fish are likely to ingest nurdles. This can poison them or lead to digestive impaction, killing them.
4. Nurdle-eating fish caught and consumed may pass toxins up the food web to people and other animals that predate on fish.

If you spend time by or in the water, reach out to me at [james@mtwatershed.com](mailto:james@mtwatershed.com), especially if you fish or boat along the Ohio River, Beaver River, or Raccoon Creek. A land-based nurdle patrol takes just fifteen minutes and links to a national database, helping to keep our region clean and hold polluters accountable. The more data we keep now, the better shot we have of exposing large spills in the future. Spills and releases are preventable, but they won't stop without someone keeping track of them.

# CAMPAIGNS

## **RUSTIC RIDGE ISSUES PERSIST, EXPANSION LOOMS**

Rustic Ridge #1, operated by LCT Energy Inc, is a bituminous deep coal mine that is currently operating within a 2,800 acre area in Saltlick Township, Fayette County and Donegal Township, Westmoreland County. Within the past five years of operation, our coalfield communities have been experiencing a growing list of negative impacts: loss of water quantity and quality, irreparable subsidence damage to homes, road dust and damage, dangerous truck traffic, and health issues such as extreme stress from these day-to-day issues.

Over 40 concerned community members and invested groups showed up to express their concerns at an informal public comment with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) held in January. As a result, DEP issued an 8-page deficiency letter to LCT Energy, citing a variety of issues with their current operation. Permit renewal is pending.

In the meantime, LCT Energy has proposed a 1,400-acre northward expansion in Donegal Township. The proposed expansion would undermine even more residential and commercial properties, shale gas infrastructure, several miles of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the newly redesigned Donegal turnpike interchange, and the headwaters of Fourmile Run, which is within the Loyalhanna Watershed. Expert analysis of this expansion suggests that mining could dewater the headwaters of Fourmile Run, including Donegal Lake, while causing Champion Creek to flood. The permit is currently under technical review by DEP, and an informal public comment session was held on May 25, where dozens of community members expressed their concerns to DEP.

To put our concerns into action, our community group meets monthly, monitors the site, and plans actions to address issues such as dangerous truck traffic. If you are interested in joining our efforts please contact MWA at [stacey@mtwatershed.com](mailto:stacey@mtwatershed.com) or 724-455-4200 x9.

## **MOUNTAIN PINES EXPANSION UPDATE**

On May 11th, 2022, the Fayette Zoning Hearing Board held a public hearing to determine if Mountain Pines should be granted a special exception to expand their campground onto the old Clifford Pritts Elementary School in Saltlick Township. Mountain Pines has a history of environmental violations, and allowing them to expand may exacerbate these issues. Approximately 55 community members attended the hearing to oppose the expansion.

Ultimately, we exhausted the scheduled time for the first hearing, and a continuance is scheduled for Wednesday, July 27th at 1pm at the Fayette County 911 Building, 22 East Main Street, Uniontown, PA.

We urge community members to show up again in green to this next hearing. This process can be long, but it is important we attend to show the Zoning Hearing Board that the community is not in favor of this expansion. If you would like to get involved or voice any opinions, please reach out to our Community Organizer, Stacey Magda. at [stacey@mtwatershed.com](mailto:stacey@mtwatershed.com).

## **MEET OUR NEW COMMUNITY ADVOCATE**



Meet Madison Hinkle! Born and raised in West Virginia with a deep love of the outdoors, she is eager to join our advocacy team to hold polluters accountable in the Yough!

# CONSERVATION

## FRESHWATER SPONGES FOUND DURING SURVEYS



Photo: Taylor Robbins

Freshwater sponges are inconspicuous and grow on rocks in the streambed.

This May, AmeriCorps members waded through Kooser Run to collect freshwater sponges for water quality data. They were led by Marc Yergin, a volunteer researcher at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and pioneer of freshwater sponge research in Western Pennsylvania.

Sponges are ancient allies, estimated to have appeared on earth between 500-100 million years ago. They work as natural filters feeding on bacteria and small organic particles that pass through them. High quality of water means more freshwater sponges and more freshwater sponges mean higher quality of water.

In recent years, Marc has recorded a decline in the size and frequency of freshwater sponges in Kooser Run and other surrounding areas. Decline in sponge population can be caused by agriculture run-off, acid mine drainage, chemical spills, and other disturbances.

Despite possibly being the oldest recorded animals on earth, freshwater sponges are incredibly sensitive, requiring a healthy pH and low levels of pollutants. While the sponges were smaller than some recorded in previous years, every tan booger-like invertebrate the members found provoked a feeling of hope, as well as served as a reminder of the important work there is to do.

## TESTING NEW WAYS TO REMOVE ALUMINUM

The Rondell Correal abandoned mine drainage treatment system located in Saltlick Township, Fayette County is a pilot program in developing an effective method to treat high levels of aluminum. The discharge comes from the old Rondell Strip Mine Operation that mined the middle Kittanning and Brookville-Clarion coal seams. The Mountain Watershed Association completed the pilot treatment system with Cosmos Technologies using their patented Catalytic Advanced Oxidation process. With the goal of treating high levels of aluminum in the water, the pilot treatment system has shown significant improvement to water quality.

Prior to treatment, the Rondell-Correal mine discharged approximately 60 mg/L of aluminum and 40 mg/L of Iron. The system was effective in reducing both contaminants to <1 mg/L when operating, and on average, the pH increased from 3 to 7. While the system requires modifications to before it can be permanently installed, this was an exciting opportunity for the Mountain Watershed Association to test new and developing technology in acid mine drainage treatment methods.

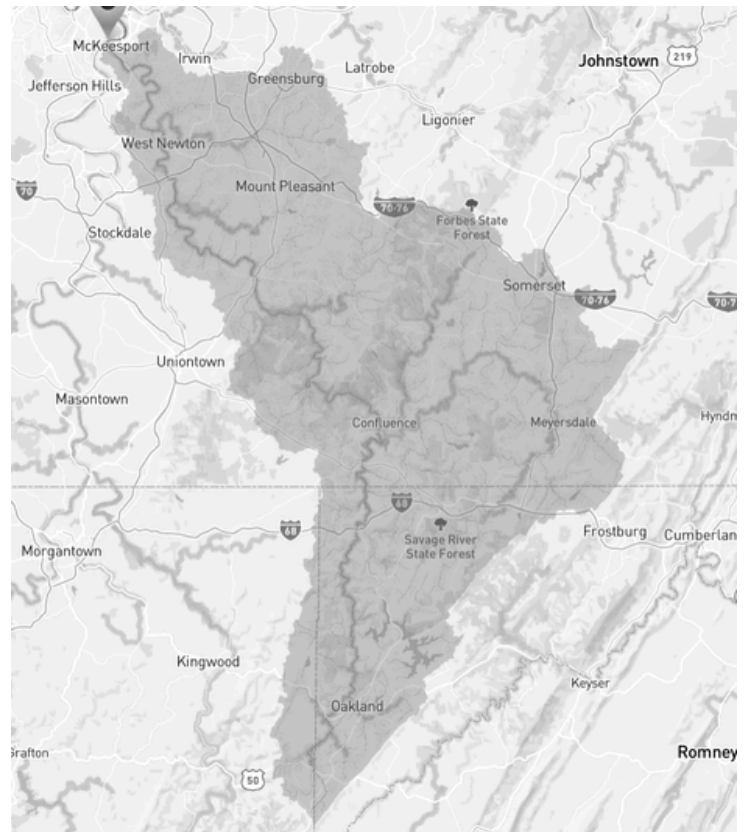
# CONSERVATION

## FIRST YOUGH RIVER CONVERGENCE A SUCCESS

Mountain Watershed Association recently hosted the first annual Yough Watershed Convergence, a gathering of conservation groups within the Yough Watershed. Because an array of conservation efforts are happening within the Youghiogheny River and its tributaries, MWA is interested in connecting these groups to meet and share project updates, successes, troubles, ideas, and needs. Projects are often costly, time consuming, and take continued maintenance and oversight. We hope that creating a space for these conversations will lead to more collaborations and increased amplification of the region's collective conservation efforts.

We live in an area rich with conservation influence. Participating groups include the Casselman River Watershed Association, Deep Creek Watershed Foundation, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Chestnut Ridge Trout Unlimited, Jacobs Creek Watershed Association, Somerset, Fayette, and Westmoreland Conservation Districts, Ohiopyle State Park, and Sewickley Creek Watershed Association.

There is so much work happening here! We discussed water quality monitoring, stormwater management, stakeholder engagement, abandoned mine land remediation, groundwater flow modeling, and project funding. We heard from each group about their organization's mission and projects. We will continue to engage with these groups and will host the 2nd Annual Yough Watershed Convergence next year.



"The Youghiogheny Watershed Convergence was an inspiring motivator. It was uplifting to be around people who value our regional natural heritage and accept the personal responsibility to work to protect and restore it. Sometimes, as we work hard as volunteers on our own organization's priorities and projects, there's a tendency to feel isolated and overwhelmed. But connecting with other groups working throughout our incomparable Youghiogheny watershed gives you a new encouraging perspective. You realize that all these efforts, all over the basin, can have a cumulative positive impact on the river, and thus on this entire region. It's an example of "The sum is greater than the parts." I appreciate Mountain Watershed Association for pulling this together. Benefits will come from this that we could not even imagine."

**BEN MOYER**  
PRESIDENT,  
CHESTNUT RIDGE CHAPTER OF TROUT UNLIMITED

# EDUCATION

## WATER GUARDIANS BEGINS NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

MWA is happy to announce a new upcoming education project of ours: the Water Guardians After School Youth Club. During the 2022-23 school year, this club will take place at elementary schools in Normalville and Connellsville. For each school, Water Guardian club meetings will occur twice a month and provide students with a plethora of opportunities to gain experience through ecology-based activities. These activities will center around discussing water quality, climate change, and environmental justice issues.

Our club meetings will be spent by doing one of the following: we will either have a guest speaker visit, a classroom activity, or field trip. The Water Guardians club is able to exist thanks to grant funding from the DEP Environmental Education grant program, volunteer engagement, and MWA's strive to invest in our community. We hope everyone is as excited as we are for this new endeavor! If you are interested in having your child become a Water Guardian, keep an eye on our social media accounts and MWA website for updates and information. Please reach out to either [morgan@mtwatershed.com](mailto:morgan@mtwatershed.com), or [hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:hannah@mtwatershed.com) with questions about this project.



Photo: Hannah Spencer

## BORROW GEAR FROM OUR RESOURCE LIBRARY

Upon receiving a generous grant from the Fayette County Community Foundation, MWA is creating a resource library of outdoor gear and educational resources available to the public. Items in the library can be signed out and borrowed for both weekdays and weekends.

Resources in the library will include items like waders, binoculars, field guides, maps, backpacks, and more! We are also extremely excited to announce that we will have children's fishing poles thanks receiving the 2022 Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission R3 Grant. It is MWA's hope that this resource library makes outdoor recreation more accessible to the community it serves and inspires people to simply get out there! The resource library will be located at the MWA office and is expected to be completed and operational by next Spring.

## MEET OUR NEW ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR



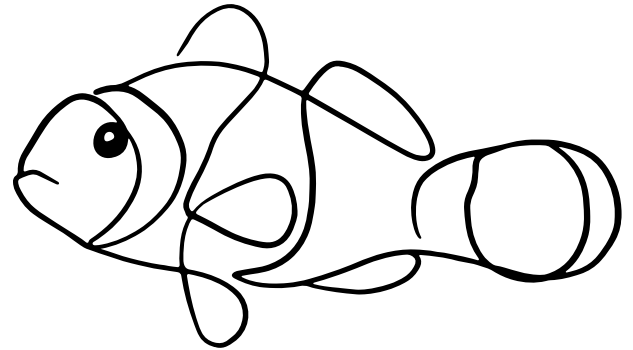
Meet Katlyn Furlong, a poet and herbalist, co-existing with nature in the Laurel Highlands. She is excited to empower the next generation of stewards.

# EVENTS

## JOIN US AT RESH PARK FOR AN OUTDOOR SCREENING OF FINDING NEMO

We will be showing the film about everyone's favorite clownfish, Finding Nemo, at Resh Park on Friday, July 8.

Kids activities will begin around 8:00pm and the film will start at dark. Please RSVP on the website event or email [Hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:Hannah@mtwatershed.com) so we can get an estimate the quantity of food and drink needed.



## FLOAT THE YOUGH AND SUPPORT THE INDIAN CREEK VALLEY TRAIL

Join us on a 4-hour Yough River Float Trip with Hazelbakers River Trips! Arrive at 10am to sign waivers and prepare boats for launch. We will shuttle to Dawson and float back to Layton, approximately four hours of moving flatwater - perfect for families and beginners! After the float, BBQ and refreshments will be available at a pavilion, where we will have a 50/50 ticket raffle and information about Mountain Watershed Association. Canoe and kayak rentals are included with the ticket price. Please reserve boats with [Hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:Hannah@mtwatershed.com).

## ARE YOU READY FOR A HIKING CHALLENGE THAT HELPS YOUR MIND, BODY, AND SOUL?

Join Mountain Watershed Association for this 5-part hiking series from May to September.

Each month we will increase mileage and terrain difficulty while exploring areas within the Youghiogheny River watershed to connect and enjoy the natural world.

It's a great opportunity to build strength, gain stamina, connect with nature, and meet new friends!

### Hiking Challenge Schedule:

Hike #1 (2 miles) on 5/14 at Indian Creek Gorge

Hike #2 (3.63 miles) on 6/25 at Laurel Hill State Park

Hike #3 (4.67 miles) on 7/16 at Roaring Run Nature Reserve

Hike #4 (5.1 miles) on 8/20 at Bear Run Nature Reserve

Hike #5 (6.36 miles) on 9/17 at Ohiopyle State Park

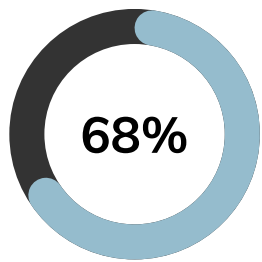
Each hike starts at 9:00am and finishes around 10:30am. Please RSVP on the website events or with [Hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:Hannah@mtwatershed.com). Specific directions will be emailed out to guests on the RSVP list.

# TRAILS



Photo: Taylor Robbins

## SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING PROMPTS PLANNING STAGE FOR STEYER BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION



We successfully fundraised the cost of building the Steyer Bridge across Indian Creek. Planning and construction are anticipated to start in 2022. This brings us one step closer to completing the Indian Creek Valley Trail.

We will continue gathering funds to regrade, add drainage, and surface the ICVT trail section leading from Rt. 381 to the Steyer Bridge.

**Current Progress: \$215,500 of \$330,000**

**\$90,000 for bridge decking and safety railings**

**\$240,000 for drainage, regrading, and a new gravel surface for 6/10th of a mile from Rt. 381**

## TRAIL TUESDAYS ON THE INDIAN CREEK VALLEY TRAIL

Join us on the Indian Creek Valley Trail for a relaxed walk every Tuesday evening during the summer months. These walks are not guided, but MWA staff will be present at each hike. This is a great way to meet and talk with staff and other MWA supporters. Also, it's a chance to get out on the trail with a group of people if you are uncomfortable with new trails or solitary hiking.

**Every Tuesday starting at 6:30pm**

Rain dates will be held on the following Thursday

## MEET OUR NEW TRAIL AND FIELD SPECIALIST



Meet Courtney Berish, a water loving raft guide with a passion for protecting our wild places. She will be assisting with water sampling and trail work!

**Questions about the trail?  
Contact our Conservation Manager,  
Taylor Robbins at 724-455-4200 x #8**



**Join our email list to receive monthly email updates from MWA about trail events and progress.**



# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

We hope you will join us at an event this summer. For questions and to RSVP, please call 724-455-4200 ext. 4# or email [Hannah@mtwatershed.com](mailto:Hannah@mtwatershed.com)

## **July 8 - Finding Nemo + Kids Activities**

Starts at 8:00pm - Resh Park in Indian Head

## **July 16 - Hiking Challenge: Part 3**

Starts at 9:00am - Meet at Roaring Run Natural Area - please RSVP

## **July 31 - Yough River Float**

Float begins at 10:00am - Hazelbaker's Canoe Rentals in Layton

*Purchase tickets and reserve boats by July 29*

## **August 13 - Hiking Challenge: Part 4**

Starts at 9:00am - Meet at Bear Run Nature Preserve - please RSVP

## **September 17 - Hiking Challenge: Part 5**

Starts at 9:00am - Meet at Ohiopyle State Park - please RSVP

## **September 24 - Indian Creek Watershed Festival**

*The first 100 kids at the fishing derby will receive a free fishing pole!*

## **November 2 - Annual Membership Meeting & Celebration**

6:00pm - Saint Raymond of the Mountains Parish in Donegal

## **November 6 - Brunch Bingo for the ICVT**

## **November 17 - Yough Defense Party**

2:00 - 10:00pm - Falls City Pub in Ohiopyle

**VISIT [WWW.MTWATERSHED.COM/EVENTS](http://WWW.MTWATERSHED.COM/EVENTS) TO LEARN MORE**

# MWA STAFF

Ashley Funk, Executive Director  
Carla Ruddock, Director of Conservation  
Eric Harder, Youghiogeny  
Melissa Marshall, Community Advocate  
Madison Hinkle, Community Advocate  
Stacey Magda, Community Organizer  
James Cato, Community Organizer  
Taylor Robbins, Conservation & Recreation Manager  
Hannah Spencer, Outreach Coordinator  
Alicia Martin, Operations Manager  
Morgan Moran, AmeriCorps Member  
Katlyn Furlong, Americorps Member  
Courtney Berish, Americorps Member



Several staff members recently attended a dinner for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

Left to right: Ashley Funk, Alicia Martin, James Cato, Carla Ruddock, Morgan Moran, and Stacey Magda

# BECOME A MEMBER

Join the effort to protect, preserve, and restore the Indian Creek and greater Youghiogeny River watersheds!

Name

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Address

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Phone

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Email

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## Membership Levels

- \$10 | Stream Ally
- \$25 | Stream Friend
- \$60 | Stream Defender
- \$120 | Stream Champion
- \$240 | Stream Hero
- \$600 | Stream Guardian
- \$1,200 | Stream Sustainer

\$

You can make a donation or renew your membership on our website OR you can mail a check to Mountain Watershed Association | PO Box 408 Melcroft, PA 15462

The official registration and financial information of the Mountain Watershed Association, Inc. may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999



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