

MISSISSIPPI SPRING SEASON TURKEY HUNTING GUIDE





The Magnolia State is a tremendous place to pursue spring turkey hunting. To conserve wild turkeys for future generations and ensure today's hunters are afforded a quality experience, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) governs turkey hunting through a variety of rules and regulations. This guide is meant to be a quick reference for hunters interested in understanding the spring season's requirements and planning a rewarding trip afield.

SEASON DATES

Mississippi's spring turkey season kicks off with a youth season for hunters under the age of sixteen. It then moves to a 48-day regular season for everyone. Non-residents who wish to hunt public land face additional restrictions.

YOUTH SEASON:
MARCH 8 - 14

REGULAR SPRING SEASON:
MARCH 15 - MAY 1

Certain public lands may have different season frameworks, so be sure and check before you go.

Non-Residents intending to hunt any **Public Lands** between March 8 - 31 must first be drawn for either the Non-Resident Public Land Endorsement OR a WMA draw hunt.

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

Specific licenses are required to hunt turkeys in Mississippi. These licenses may vary depending upon whether a hunter is a resident of Mississippi or a non-resident. Some individuals are exempt from needing a license.

RESIDENTS of Mississippi, unless exempt from purchasing a hunting license, must have either an (1) All-Game Hunting/Fishing License OR (2) a Sportsman's License.

Resident hunters under the age of 16, over the age of 65, those who meet certain disability requirements, or who are hunting on land titled in their own name are exempt from license requirements.

PUBLIC LAND HUNTERS may be required to obtain other licenses or permits. Always check the area-specific regulations for the public land you intend to hunt before going afield. Potential public land hunters need to be aware of the following permits:

WMA USER PERMIT: Required when turkey hunting any MDWFP Wildlife Management Area.

NON-RESIDENT PUBLIC LAND ENDORSEMENT: Required for non-residents hunting open public lands before April 1 (See "Non-Resident Public Land Draw" section).

OTHER PERMITS: public land managed by other entities may require additional permits.

HUNTER EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS: All persons born on or after January 1, 1972, must satisfactorily complete a hunter education course approved by the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks before purchasing a Mississippi hunting license.

BAG LIMIT

BAG LIMIT: One (1) adult gobbler or 1 gobbler with a 6-inch or longer beard per day, 3 per Spring season. Hunters 15 years of age and younger may harvest 1 gobbler of choice (any age) per day, 3 per Spring season.

DEFINITION OF A LEGAL GOBBLER: In Mississippi, year-old gobblers (commonly known as jakes) are protected from harvest by adult hunters. To meet the definition of a legal bird, gobblers must have a beard that is at least 6 inches long or have one of the following characteristics: Spurs that are at least 1/2 inch long, a tail fan that has an unbroken, rounded contour to the outer perimeter of the tail feathers, or 9th and 10th primary wing feathers with white barring extending to the outer tips of the feathers.



Scan to Buy
a License

WILD TURKEY IDENTIFICATION

ADULT MALE TURKEY
(TOM / GOBBLER)

VS

JUVENILE MALE TURKEY
(JAKE)



A legal adult gobbler beard is required to be 6 inches or more in length and hangs down clearly.



Shorter beard, usually less than 5 inches, often stubby and not as noticeable.

When fanned out, all tail feathers are the same length, forming a smooth, even circle.



When fanned out, the middle tail feathers are longer than the rest, creating an uneven look.



Spurs on the legs are longer and sharper, often 3/4 inch or more.



Spurs are much smaller, usually less than 1/2 inch, and less defined.

Generally larger and heavier than Jakes, with a more robust build.

Heads have bright and bold colors like red, blue, and white, especially during mating season.

Smaller and less muscular compared to a Tom.

GOBBLER

VS

HEN



Black feathers with colorful hues;
Colorful heads

Caruncles
(or Wattles)

Prominent Beard

No Noticeable
Wattle

No Beard



Dull brown feathers
& grayish heads

PLUMAGE: Gobblers have black body feathers which are highly iridescent and may give them a bronze, green, or copper hue depending upon lighting. Hen turkeys are typically drabber in coloration; their body feathers are usually brown.

HEAD & NECK: During spring, gobblers have gaudy heads which can turn a variety of colors from deep red to snow white and may even show bits of blue. Hens, by comparison, have smaller, grayish heads with considerably more feathering than gobblers.

During the spring season, gobblers have prominent caruncles, or wattles, at the base of the neck. These are unnoticeable or absent in hens.

BEARDS: While both male and female turkeys might have beards, beards are fairly rare in hen turkeys.

BEHAVIOR: Gobbling and strutting are behaviors which are almost exclusive to gobblers.

HUNTING METHODS

MDWFP believes providing hunters with wide allowances to hunt how they see fit is the right approach to ensure hunter satisfaction. While there are many ways to harvest your bird, some restrictions do apply.

- **SHOOTING HOURS:** Legal shooting hours are one-half (1/2) hour before sunrise to one-half (1/2) hour after sunset.
- **LEGAL METHODS:** Shotguns with no larger than number two (#2) shot as well as compound, recurve and longbows.
- **DECOYS:** Turkey hunters may use decoys, and there are no restrictions on the type, form, or technique of decoy usage. However, hunters **CANNOT** use live turkeys as decoys.
- Turkeys **CANNOT** be hunted with the aid of bait.
- Hunters **CANNOT** employ the use of a dog.
- Hunters **CANNOT** use recordings, tapes, sound reproducing devices or any other electrically amplified imitation turkey calls.



REPORTING YOUR HARVEST

In Mississippi, all hunters, regardless of license status, are required to report their spring turkey harvest through MDWFP's Game Check system. Game Check is a program designed to track wild turkey harvest on a county-by-county basis. Turkey harvests must be reported within the Game Check system by **10pm on the day of the harvest.**



WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO GAME CHECK?

BEFORE HUNTING

All turkey hunters must carry a current harvest record while spring turkey hunting. The record may be:

- The Mississippi HuntFish App on a smartphone with the hunter's profile.
- A paper copy of the MDWFP harvest record.
- A paper copy harvest record of the hunter's choosing.

AFTER HARVESTING

Before moving a turkey from the harvest location, hunters must complete a Game Check submission on the MDWFP mobile app using their smartphone OR complete a harvest record on paper. You must record your name, license number, address, phone number, and date of the harvest on the paper copy form. Hunters are encouraged to take advantage of the mobile smartphone app.

If using the paper harvest record, the Game Check submission can be completed later (but before 10PM) by:

- Calling the Game Check reporting line at **1-800-BE-SMART.**
- Entering the harvest via the Game Check website.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING DURING SPRING TURKEY SEASON

Many hunters choose to supplement white-tailed deer nutrition using feeders. While this practice is not prohibited during spring turkey season, rules and statutes which regulate the harvest of white-tailed deer using supplemental feeders **DO NOT** apply to wild turkeys and spring turkey hunting.

It is both **ILLEGAL** to hunt turkeys with the aid of bait **AND** to bait them to an area with the intent of hunting. Hunters should be aware that supplemental feeding of white-tailed deer during the spring season has the potential to be construed as both baiting turkeys and hunting turkeys with the aid of bait if turkey hunting is occurring in the vicinity of supplemental feeders.

In defining baiting of wild turkeys, administration rules state: No person, at any time, shall take, catch, or kill any wild turkey by means, aid or use, directly or indirectly, of any bait such as shelled, shucked or un-shucked corn or of wheat or other grain, or any feed whatsoever that has been deposited or scattered so as to constitute an attraction or enticement to, on, or over the area where such person or persons are attempting to kill or take them; provided, however, that wild turkeys may be taken over grains resulting from normal agricultural practices.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is exempt from buying a hunting license?
Minors under the age of sixteen (16) and residents who are sixty-five (65) or older are not required to buy a hunting license. Other exemptions include those who are visually impaired, paraplegic, a multiple-amputee, adjudged totally disabled by the Social Security Administration or totally service connected disabled by the Veterans Administration. Residents exempt based on this criteria are required to have proof of their age, residency, disability status, or other physical impairment in their possession while engaged in hunting activities.

How long do I have to report my turkey with Game Check?

You are required by law to report your turkey by 10 P.M. on the day of harvest. However, it is recommended to report as soon as possible.

Can I apply for both the Non-Resident Open Public Land License Endorsement drawing and the traditional WMA draw hunts?

Yes.



Do the WMA/Public Land Endorsement drawings utilize preference points?

No, the drawings are 100% random with everyone having an equal chance of winning.

How do I know if I was successful in a drawing?

Winners will be e-mailed award notifications. Hunters can check the status of their draw applications at any time in the licensing system.

Where can a youth hunt outside of private land?

Any public land which designates the youth turkey season in their regulations as well as open public lands. (See TURKEY HUNTING ON PUBLIC LANDS - OPEN PUBLIC LANDS on following page)

What is the age requirement for the youth season?

A youth hunter must be 15 years old or younger.

Can a youth hunt by themselves?

Yes, if the youth is at least 12 years old and has completed the hunter's education course approved by the department.

What if the youth isn't 12 years old?

The youth has to be in the presence and under the direct supervision of a licensed or exempt hunter that is at least 21 years old.

What type of license does the supervising hunter need?

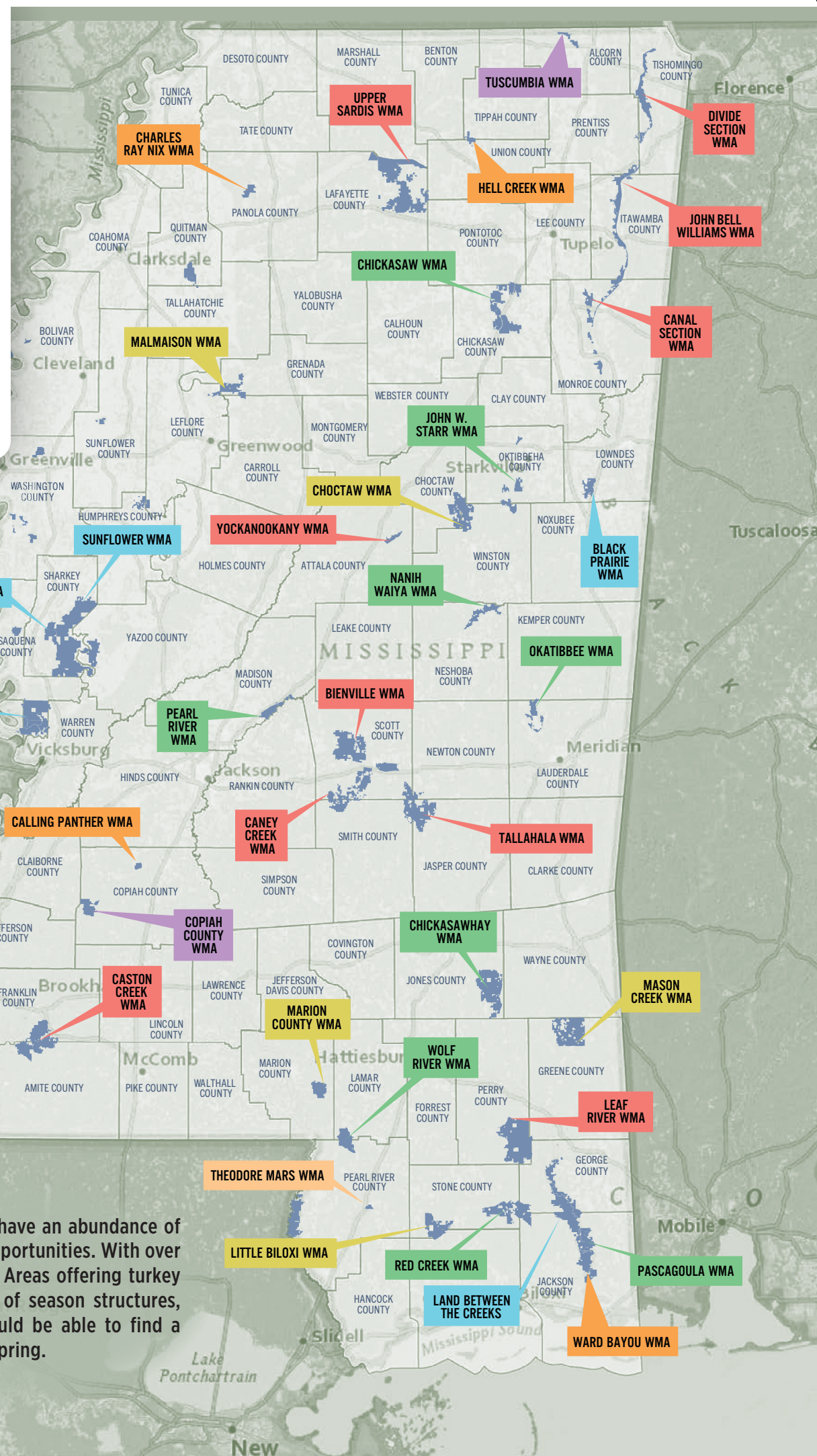
A valid Mississippi license for the species being hunted.

Can I bring my child to Mississippi and hunt open public lands or WMAs during the youth season as a non-resident?

Only if the supervising non-resident hunter has been drawn in the non-resident public land draw.

WMAs OFFERING TURKEY HUNTING SPRING SEASON

- EARLY SEASON DRAW / OPEN AFTER MARCH 31ST
- DRAW ONLY
- STATEWIDE SEASON
- YOUTH ONLY
- YOUTH DRAW ONLY
- APRIL 1 - MAY 1 SEASON
- EXTENDED DRAW / OPEN AFTER APRIL 17TH



Mississippi is blessed to have an abundance of quality turkey hunting opportunities. With over 40 Wildlife Management Areas offering turkey hunting under a variety of season structures, every turkey hunter should be able to find a place to go afield in the spring.

TURKEY HUNTING ON PUBLIC LANDS

STATEWIDE SEASON WMAs: These WMAs follow statewide season structure and are open to all residents. Non-residents must possess a Public Land Endorsement to hunt before April 1.

- Chickasaw WMA
- John W. Starr WMA
- Okatibbee WMA
- Pearl River WMA
- Wolf River WMA
- Chickasawhay WMA
- Nanih Waiya WMA
- Pascagoula River WMA
- Red Creek WMA

APRIL 1ST OPENING DATE WMAs: These WMAs are part of an experimental season structure and open to all hunters on April 1. Youth season is the last weekend in March.

- Choctaw WMA
- Malmaison WMA
- Mason Creek WMA
- Little Biloxi WMA
- Marion County WMA

YOUTH ONLY WMAs: Only open to youth hunters under the age of 16.

- Theodore Mars WMA

DRAW HUNT WMAs: These WMAs require a draw permit to hunt at some point during the season.

Early Season Draw WMAs – Require a draw permit to hunt in March. Open to all hunters on April 1. Youth season does not require a draw.

- Bienville WMA
- Caney Creek WMA
- Divide Section WMA
- Leaf River WMA
- Tallahala WMA
- Yockanookany WMA
- Canal Section WMA
- Caston Creek WMA
- John Bell Williams WMA
- Sandy Creek WMA
- Upper Sardis WMA

Extended Draw WMAs – Require a draw permit to hunt through April 17. Open to all hunters on April 18. Youth season does not require a draw.

- Copiah County WMA
- Tuscumbia WMA

Draw Only WMAs – Require a draw permit to hunt all portions of the season.

- Black Prairie WMA
- Land Between the Creeks
- Phil Bryant WMA
- Sunflower WMA
- Canemount WMA
- Mahannah WMA
- Shipland WMA
- Twin Oaks WMA

Youth Only Draw WMAs – Youth require a draw permit to hunt.

- Calling Panther WMA
- Hell Creek WMA
- Ward Bayou WMA
- Charles Ray Nix WMA
- Natchez State Park WMA

Applying for WMA Draw Hunts:

- Application Period: January 1st – 31st
Apply in MDWFP's new licensing system at <https://licensing.outdoors.ms/>
- WMA Draw Hunt Webpage (<https://www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/wma-draw-hunts>)
- All hunters (including under 16, over 65, and handicap) applying for a WMA draw hunt must possess a current valid WMA permit, lifetime hunting license, or a youth/senior exempt license to apply for a WMA Draw Hunt.
- WMA User Permit Fees: \$15 for resident and \$30 for non-resident
- Randomized Drawing (no preference points)

WMA DRAW HUNT GUESTS/YOUTH: During permitted draw hunts for turkey, for selected hunters 21 years old or older, one youth aged 15 years old or younger may accompany or hunt with the permitted adult hunter. The adult and youth combined harvest shall not exceed the permit bag limit. The drawn hunter may have one non-permitted, licensed guest 16 years of age or older. This guest is not allowed to harvest a turkey, but may participate in the hunt (i.e., calling, etc.).

OPEN PUBLIC LANDS: Lands open to public hunting that have statewide season frameworks without other special regulations limiting hunting. These lands are owned and managed by different entities and may require additional permits (i.e. Corps of Engineers lands and National Wildlife Refuges) so always review the rules and regulations before your hunt. Open public lands include:

- Non-draw hunt Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)
- National Forest lands
- Corps of Engineers lands
- National Wildlife Refuges
- Department of Defense lands
- Lands open to public hunting managed by other entities.

Non-Resident Public Land Draw

All non-residents hunting open public lands (refer to "OPEN PUBLIC LANDS" section) prior to April 1 are required to possess a no cost Public Land Endorsement. The endorsement will be allotted in limited quantities via a drawing conducted in February. Winners will be notified by email.

- **Application Period: January 1st – 31st.**
Apply in MDWFP's new licensing system at <https://licensing.outdoors.ms/>
- MDWFP Non-Resident Turkey Draw Webpage <https://www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/wildlife-species-program/wild-turkey-program/non-resident-public-land-draw>
- Public land endorsement not required for traditional WMA draw hunts. Your winning permit notification for the WMA drawing will serve in lieu of the Public Land License Endorsement. However, without additionally acquiring the Public Land Endorsement, you will be limited to only hunting the WMA and time frame for which you were drawn.
- Open Public Lands Youth Season
 - ▶ A licensed non-resident must be drawn in the non-resident public lands draw in order to supervise a youth on open public lands or WMAs during the youth season.
- Guests
 - ▶ Drawn non-resident hunters may be accompanied by one licensed guest, aged 16 years or older. This guest is not allowed to harvest a turkey.
 - ▶ Youth: One youth aged 15 years old or younger may accompany or hunt with the permitted adult hunter. The adult and youth combined harvest shall not exceed the permit bag limit.
- There are no lifetime license exemptions. Your current residency status precedes your Lifetime License in determining the need to acquire the Non-Resident Public Land License Endorsement.

HELP WITH WILD TURKEY MANAGEMENT

SPRING GOBBLER HUNTER SURVEY: The spring gobbler hunter survey is a voluntary survey that is used as a means of collecting long-term data on turkey activity and populations. With this information, MDWFP gains valuable information on trends in gobbling activity, hunter effort, harvest rates, age structure and sex ratios. Participant even receive an individualized report that summarizes your data, allowing you to track trends over time. We encourage all turkey hunters to participate. There is no cost and your data will not be shared. To join, visit the Spring Gobbler Hunter Survey webpage here: <https://www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/wildlife-species-program/wild-turkey-program/spring-gobbler-hunter-survey>.



REPORT SICK TURKEY: To report a sick or injured wild turkey, please contact the Wildlife Bureau at 601-432-2199 Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm. For after-hours, please call the MDWFP 24-hour hotline at 1-800-BESMART (1-800-237-6278).

REPORT POACHING: To report a wildlife violation regarding wild turkeys, contact your local conservation officer, or call the MDWFP 24-hour hotline at 1-800-BESMART (1-800-237-6278).

PRIVATE LANDS PROGRAM: If you would like more information about managing for wild turkeys on your property, or you would like a meeting with a wildlife biologist, please request a site visit at <https://www.mdwfp.com/privatelands>. This is a free service available to landowners of any size in Mississippi.



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