



STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

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December 2023 Progress Report

Serving People, Conserving Fish and Wildlife

This 2023-2024 Strategic Plan progress report is a regular update to document the planned and ongoing efforts to meet the conservation and management efforts of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

Agency leadership and dedicated staff across the commonwealth work tirelessly to maintain and better the opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts as well as the health and populations of our nearly 1,000 native fish and wildlife species. This detailed two-year plan serves to keep priority management strategies the focus of our work, while including and adapting to new contingencies as they may arise.

On the following pages, we are pleased to provide you with updates on current programs and endeavors, and present new initiatives with thoughtful and measured planning. Guided by science-based decision making and best practices, these strategies guide our agency in making the necessary progress to address our most important conservation and recreational access challenges.

Our strategic plan outlines our five primary goals to:

- Manage for sustainable fish and wildlife populations and habitats
- Increase opportunities for and participation in fish and wildlife recreation
- Increase public awareness, engagement and partnerships
- Enhance the department's responsiveness and effectiveness
- Protect Kentucky's fish and wildlife resources and promote user safety

We hope this plan provides you with a deeper understanding of our agency's priorities and the thoughtful, science-based endeavors of agency staff across the commonwealth.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Rich Storm
Commissioner



Strategic Plan Initiatives: 2023-2024

Goal 1 Manage for sustainable fish and wildlife populations and habitats

Initiative 1	Expand the use of 'active management' conservation practices on public lands and waters.	Status	July - December 2023
1.1.a.	Manage 3,800 acres of forests annually on WMAs with the use of prescribed fire, selective harvest, and forest stand improvement	Ongoing	Completed 2,293 acres of forest inventory, along with 5,500 acres of prescribed fire forest management and 1,281 non-prescribed fire forest management practices. Currently harvesting timber with a focus on improving wildlife habitat at Grayson Lake WMA and Taylorsville Lake WMA, and recently posted a bid package and selected a vendor for a harvest at Fleming WMA.
1.1.b.	Manage 10,000 acres of open lands on WMAs annually with prescribed fire, disking, herbicide treatments and other methods	Ongoing	Completed 10,000 +/- acres of prescribed fire, 7,424 acres annual grains completed by sharecropping, 3,322 acres annual grains planted for wildlife food and cover, 945 acres cool season grasses and legumes managed by disk, mowing and/or chemical, planted 225 acres of cool season grasses and legumes, and 4,132 acres of early successional fields managed. Native warm season grass management included 1,145 acres managed (non-Rx fire), 2,548 acres managed with Rx fire, and planted 115 acres.
1.1.c.	Manage 4,500 acres of wetlands on WMAs annually using water management, disk, planting and other methods	Ongoing	Wetland management acres are completed annually at predominately Ballard, Boatwright, Doug Travis, and Sloughs WMAs located in western Kentucky. Extreme drought conditions allowed for additional acres to be managed this year using disk and chemical applications to set back succession and stimulate native vegetation. Completed 5,810 acres of water management of moist soil units. Staff maintain 206 water control structures, 41 water wells/pumps, and 140 waterfowl blinds/pits.
1.1.d.	Update WMA management plans on WMAs with "High Management Level" designation by June 30, 2023	Delayed	Staff, including experts from GIS, Nongame/Diversity, and WMAs, continue to work together to develop a WMA planning tool. Excessive workload and staffing changes have delayed this initiative, with plans to work towards a functional planning tool being developed in 2024.
1.1.e.	Update lake-specific management plans for all major public lakes and reservoirs (>500 acres) managed by the Department by June 30, 2023	In Progress	Plans are currently being submitted and reviewed.
Initiative 2	Expand research on species and habitat management efforts statewide.	Status	July - December 2023
1.2.a.	Conduct research on elk populations to better understand their population and management needs. Establish more precise population models, population estimates and long term growth rates using new population model developed by University of Kentucky (anticipated December 2022). Determine hunting and viewing goals by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress (annual)	The final report for the four-year Statistical Population Reconstruction (SPR) model was presented in late June 2023 and presented at the June and September commission meetings. Additionally, data collection for the five-year model was underway during the fall elk seasons through the collection of hunter-harvested elk teeth. Mortality investigations of the collared elk are ongoing.
1.2.b.	Conduct research on bear populations to monitor their population growth across the state and develop long term population goals, harvest strategies and objectives by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress (annual)	Additional female black bears were trapped in the late summer of 2023 to bolster the sample size that can be applied to our ongoing work involving survival and reproduction.

1.2.c.	Conduct research on non-game species to determine management needs and population trends for the states most at risk species	Ongoing	Activities from July to December 2023 included qualitative and quantitative surveys for freshwater mussels and monarch butterflies, long-term songbird monitoring at Shaker Village, herpetofauna surveillance at Mammoth Cave National Park, and the use of thermal cameras and recorders to monitor activity at Virginia big-eared bat maternity colonies. Construction of Kentucky's eastern hellbender salamander captive breeding project facilities were completed including an outdoor raceway at Minor Clark Fish Hatchery and grow out (egg to subadult) area at the Center for Mollusk Conservation in Frankfort. Six adult eastern hellbenders were obtained from partner facilities for use in the captive breeding program. Staff, partners, and volunteers assisted with a two day yellow spotted woodland salamander survey in selected sites across three southeastern Kentucky counties. The survey yielded over 400 individual records representing at least eleven different species of salamander, over half of which are among Kentucky's species of greatest conservation need in the newly revised State Wildlife Action Plan.
1.2.d.	Conduct research on hunter effort for various wildlife game species to index wildlife population change, parameterize population models, inform season dates and bag limits on hunted species by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress (ongoing)	The turkey program conducts annual surveys of eligible license customers to develop estimates of spring turkey hunting participation, effort, success rate, and harvest, and turkey hunting effort data are also collected from successful hunters through the online telecheck process. For small game species, ongoing efforts for data collection include hangtags on Peabody WMA, Rockcastle River WMA, and Clay WMA, the statewide annual rural mail carrier survey, and voluntary hunter log surveys. Hunters and trappers of river otter and bobcat are surveyed annually to collect harvest effort data used for statistical population reconstruction models to estimate abundance, recruitment, survival, and harvest vulnerability of these two species in Kentucky. The deer program collects hunter effort information via our WMA quota hunt surveys for deer and the new CWD survey for hunters in the CWD surveillance zone. The elk program conducts a mandatory elk hunter survey at the conclusion of each elk hunting season to collect data that are foundational in the construction of a statistical population reconstruction (SPR) model used to make inferences on elk abundance.
1.2.e.	Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of different fish habitat structures and materials	Ongoing	This is an ongoing annual effort. Staff continue to add new or refurbish existing habitat sites. These sites are electrofished occasionally and the results are added to our habitat assessment database. Results are reported in the Habitat Branch Annual Performance Report.
1.2.f.	Conduct research on turkey populations to understand (1) spring harvest rates and survival of male turkeys and (2) reproductive ecology including gobbling chronology in relation to the timing of nesting, nest and hatching success, and survival and movements of hens and broods	In Progress (ongoing)	For the first study, "A Multi-State Banding Project to Investigate Factors Affecting Gobbler Harvest Rates and Assess Population Health", two of four winter turkey trapping and banding seasons have been completed across the state, and a third season is about to begin. A master's level graduate student at Tennessee Technological University is coordinating ongoing fieldwork, presented a poster of preliminary findings at a major conference, and provided a first-year project update to the Turkey Program Coordinator and Commission Members. For the second study, "Reproductive ecology of wild turkeys in Kentucky", the first of three research field seasons was completed on the study area, and the second season is about to begin. A PhD level graduate student at Tennessee Technological University is coordinating fieldwork and provided a first-year project update to the Turkey Program Coordinator and Commission Members.
Initiative 3			
Initiative 3	Evaluate native fisheries species restoration efforts.	Status	July - December 2023
1.3.a.	Continue to monitor and evaluate project success of ongoing lake sturgeon restoration efforts	Ongoing	Staff conducted annual trotline survey in the upper Cumberland River in December and recorded data collected: 150 sturgeon were caught and data collected. On average, fish are reaching 40" by age 12. Staff stocked 10,528 sturgeon in the Cumberland River and Big South Fork between July and October. The results are published in the Ichthyology Branch Annual Performance Report.
1.3.b.	Continue to monitor and evaluate project success of ongoing alligator gar restoration efforts	Ongoing	Staff stocked 1,200 alligator gar fitted with microwire tags in four lower Ohio River floodplain lakes in Ballard WMA, and 5,500 microwire tagged fish in floodplain lakes in Boatwright and Doug Travis WMAs as well as Mayfield Creek, Obion Creek, and Bayou De Chien in August 2023. Additionally, two age-3 fish were implanted with ultrasonic tags and fitted with external satellite tags then released in Turner Lake in Ballard WMA. Murray State University contract is in progress to track alligator gar. Results provided in Ichthyology Branch Annual Performance Report.

1.3.c.	Continue to monitor and evaluate project success of ongoing native walleye restoration efforts	In Progress	The final report is still in progress.
Initiative 4 Expand reservoir fish habitat initiatives.			
1.4.a.	Conduct 1 large-scale reservoir fish habitat project annually	Ongoing	Staff continued to work on the large projects in Barren River Lake and Lake Barkley. Internal discussions were started for identifying new large scale projects starting in 2024. A new Habitat Branch supervisor was hired in November 2023. The division is expanding staff capacity to do habitat work.
1.4.b.	Enhance fish habitat sites on at least 1 reservoir in each fisheries district annually	Ongoing	The seven fisheries districts continue to work on enhancing and placing new habitat sites in their reservoirs. We expect the total number of reservoir habitat projects to far exceed the goal of one per district by the end the year.
1.4.c.	Create and implement a 10-year Reservoir Habitat Improvement Plan by Dec. 31, 2022	In Progress	A draft plan has been started. A new Fish Habitat Branch supervisor was hired in November 2023. A new habitat team was formed and will craft the plan format.
Initiative 5 Carefully prioritize projects, evaluate effectiveness and adaptively manage agency Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).			
1.5.a.	Critically evaluate High Management Level WMA plans based on short term and long term goals, staffing levels and operational budgets	In Progress	GIS staff continues to develop planning tool and habitat story map for high level WMAs. With the SWAP plan being finalized in 2023, staff look forward to identifying methods to incorporate SWAP species into project planning on WMAs in 2024.
1.5.b.	Evaluate additional forestry and open lands management through contracting to maximize wildlife habitat management objectives	In Progress	Approximately 7,424 acres of annual grains were planted by sharecropping for WMA habitat management this year. Multiple row crop and hay bid packages are in the bidding and contracting stages with Finance for WMAs across the state. Dewey Lake professional forestry services contract was awarded with a completion date by Summer 2024. We received no bids for a mid-story removal forestry project utilizing Good Neighbor agreement funds for Daniel Boone National Forest.
Initiative 6 Identify critical needs for enhancing fish and wildlife species diversity that is consistent with the State Wildlife Action Plan.			
1.6.a.	Continue the review and revision to the State Wildlife Action Plan (fully complete by 2023)	Completed	The State Wildlife Action Plan comprehensive review and revision was completed in August 2023 and posted for public comment through September 15, 2023. Feedback received was incorporated, as appropriate, and the final version was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval on September 29, 2023.
1.6.b.	Ensure fish and wildlife species status changes are incorporated into final updated revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan (fully complete by 2023)	Completed	Fisheries staff provided assistance and input on the State Wildlife Action Plan teams. Staff involvement has been completed as scheduled. The SWAP was submitted to USFWS and is available on the KDFWR website.
1.6.c.	Collaborate with state partners to accomplish SWAP revision, development, and implementation by June 30, 2024	Ongoing	In September 2023, the newly-revised State Wildlife Action Plan was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval. The new 1,632-page plan replaces previous versions and is enacted upon submission. Implementation of this ten-year plan by KDFWR and state conservation partners is ongoing.

Initiative 7			
	Improve facilities at fish hatcheries and WMAs to allow staff to better manage fish and wildlife populations.	Status	July - December 2023
1.7.a.	Renovate 1 office building by Dec. 31, 2022	Completed	Pfeiffer Fish Hatchery office renovation is complete.
1.7.b.	Facilitate sediment removal from 2 hatchery ponds annually	Ongoing	Pfeiffer Fish Hatchery staff continues to remove sediment from hatchery ponds as weather conditions allow. Two ponds are completed annually.
1.7.c.	Repair 1 hatchery brood pond levee and outflow structure by Dec. 31, 2023	Completed	Repairs completed at Minor Clark Hatchery.
1.7.d.	Construct 1 new WMA office by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Building design is being finalized. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2024.
1.7.e.	Repair 2 Water Control Structures at WMAs by Dec. 31, 2023	Completed	Kentucky River, Barren River Lake, and Sloughs WMAs all received new water control structures within current term.
1.7.f.	Replace Ohio River Pump at Ballard WMA by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Design complete, working towards contract for construction.
1.7.g.	Construct 2 new storage sheds on WMAs by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Plans for multiple storage facilities developing.
Initiative 8			
	Revise and update species management plans.	Status	July - December 2023
1.8.a.	Review and update the 2030 Elk Management Plan and identify next step goals and objectives by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress	Our next Plan of Work related to the 2030 elk plan starts in 2025. Work will begin on this document in the spring of 2024. Recent accomplishments within the 2020-2024 Plan of Work centered on habitat work and land acquisition as well as on the formation of a reliable abundance estimate.
1.8.b.	Work to identify priority areas to achieve 5% of selected habitat goals set forth in the 2017 grouse plan by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress (ongoing)	As of December 2023, approximately 600 acres of timber harvesting has been completed out of a total planned acreage of 1,096.
1.8.c.	Create species management plans for major hatchery-reared species and develop procedures for evaluating the success of all current stocking efforts by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress	The Fisheries Division's muskie, morone, percid, and trout internal management teams continue to work on their species management plans. The management teams meet regularly and staff have been assigned specific tasks to complete the plans.
Goal 2	Increase opportunities for and participation in fish and wildlife recreation		
Initiative 1			
	Increase and promote boating and fishing opportunities on underutilized waters.	Status	July - December 2023
2.1.a.	Host an R3 event on one underutilized waters location annually	Completed	Facilitated a Kayak Fishing 101 class on Gunpowder Creek in Boone County.
2.1.b.	Send out 3 eBlasts to existing anglers to promote the Reel World Fishing Forecast website in the Spring and Fall.	Completed	Completed three spring eblasts to subscribers and customers with an additional fall eblast sent in September to promote license sales, fishing opportunities, and the Fishing Forecast.

Initiative 2			
	Expand our management efforts on public land in partnership with federal agencies and private landowners.	Status	July - December 2023
2.2.a.	Work closely with the U.S. Forest Service to execute a state cooperative management agreement to better conserve and enhance resources on both the Daniel Boone National Forest and the Land Between the Lakes Recreation Area and to enhance services to our mutual constituents	Completed	KDFWR joined other state agencies involved in natural resource management in signing the "Shared Stewardship Agreement" with the U.S. Forest Service on August 10, 2023.
2.2.b.	Continue to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage areas around some of the major lakes throughout the state	Ongoing	KDFWR continued to coordinate with USACOE by maintaining license and lease agreements for public access throughout the state. Staff has worked with USACOE to plan a partner meeting with all pertinent USACOE districts and KDFWR and Parks for February 2024.
2.2.c.	Expand our partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help landowners take advantage of the conservation provisions of the federal Farm Bill Program	Ongoing	All 17 of the private lands biologist positions made possible through the partnership with NRCS are either currently filled or in the process of being filled, and will continue to be maintained to support habitat management on private land across the commonwealth.
2.2.d.	Update WMA mapping to include habitat maps for minimum one High Management Level WMA* per Wildlife Region by June 30, 2023	In Progress	WMA Committee continues to work with GIS staff to develop a user friendly online application that will allow public lands biologists to more efficiently create short and long term management plans.
Initiative 3			
	Enhance agency effectiveness by implementing the Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) plan for Kentucky.	Status	July - December 2023
2.3.a.	Conduct an annual R3 summit with agency staff and partners by Dec. 31 of each year.	Completed	The annual R3 Summit was conducted on June 12. A survey was completed and sent to participants after the summit.
2.3.b.	Make a presentation about Kentucky's R3 Initiative to the entire Law Enforcement Division during annual training(s)	Completed	All employees conduct mandatory annual R3 training through the "I Am R3" course within the state employee MyPurpose website.
2.3.c.	Exhibit at the Fish and Wildlife fair annually for the 22,000+ archers and spectators at the NASP Kentucky State Tournament through June 30, 2024.	In progress	Continue to attend and set up the KDFWR booth at the Kentucky State NASP Tournament to sell hunting and fishing licenses, permits, Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing entries, Kentucky Wild memberships, branded merchandise as well as market and communicate upcoming R3 and conservation-related programs and events offered by the department.
Initiative 4			
	Improve mentor, coach and instructor development to strengthen R3 efforts.	Status	July - December 2023
2.4.a.	Certify staff at Kentucky's 4-H camps as hunter education volunteers so they can teach hunter education as part of the 4-H camp experience	Ongoing	KDFWR continues to develop a partnership with 4-H and the shooting sports program. We have been in communication with 4-H representatives about potential funding for ranges to increase access for more participants.
2.4.b.	Continue promotion of online hunter education curriculum to high school agriculture and FFA programs.	Ongoing	KDFWR has continued communication with high school agriculture and FFA programs. We have assisted with several hunter education certification range days.
2.4.c.	Evaluate the potential for providing online hunter education curriculum through school resource officer (SRO) safety programs by December 31, 2022	Completed	Reached out to school resource officers but they are not interested in pursuing this opportunity.

Initiative 5	Improve access to quality areas for hunting, fishing and other wildlife related recreation.	Status	July - December 2023
2.5.a.	Construct 2 new boat ramps by Dec. 31, 2024	Completed	Ramps were built at Harris Dickerson WMA, Pond River, and Camp Earl Wallace.
2.5.b.	Construct 1 fixed wooden fishing pier by Dec. 31, 2022	Completed	Pier constructed at Green River Lake State Park.
2.5.c.	Build relationships with large landholders in the east to develop 2 new hunting access areas by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress	At present, two new landowners are currently working with KDFWR to enroll their property for elk. Contracts are expected to be in place by late spring 2024.
2.5.d.	Develop a prioritized list of public fishing and hunting access improvement opportunities by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	The Fisheries Division utilizes an application process to evaluate access improvement opportunities and prioritizes projects based on need. The Wildlife Division completed the acquisition of a 54,000-acre permanent easement for public access in southeast Kentucky, finalized the donation of 565 acres in Webster County that opened to the public as Blackford Oaks WMA, purchased 225 acres in northern Franklin County that added additional opportunity for improved access to John Kleber WMA, and currently obtaining appraisals for a property in western Kentucky that would add additional acreage to an existing WMA.
2.5.e.	Evaluate WMA mobile app options by Dec. 31, 2022	Delayed	Work on this initiative was begun but has not been completed, pending other IT-related actions.
2.5.f.	Rebuild 3 boat ramps by Dec. 31, 2023	Complete	Pond River, Wilgreen Lake, and Beaver Lake ramps are complete, and West Point Ramp reconstruction is underway.
2.5.g.	Pave 4 gravel boat trailer parking areas at existing boat ramps by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Wilgreen Lake parking area was completed with asphalt. West Point parking area is slated to be paved in the spring of 2024. Multiple other sites are being evaluated for pavement.
2.5.h.	Install 2 new courtesy docks at existing boat ramps	Ongoing	Carpenter Lake dock installed and Greenup County scheduled for spring 2024.
Initiative 6	Develop new public facilities that provide additional hunting, fishing and recreational shooting opportunities.	Status	July - December 2023
2.6.a.	Increase recreational shooting opportunities through the completion of a plan and design for upgrades to existing rifle range berms and facilities by June 30, 2022	Ongoing	Kleber rifle range upgrades were completed. Contracting in process for design retrofit for multiple other agency owned rifle ranges.
2.6.b.	Apply for 2 grants for the creation of a public archery range by Dec. 31, 2021	Completed	A federal grant was obtained and used for the construction of the new public archery range at department headquarters in Frankfort.
2.6.c.	Make improvements to 2 existing WMA rifle ranges, including renovation of shooting berms and shooting facilities by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Kleber rifle range berm upgrades were completed. Otter Creek pistol pit berm upgrades completed.
2.6.d.	Complete design and construction of a new shooting facility at Veteran's Memorial WMA by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Design is nearing completion, construction expected to begin spring of 2024.
2.6.e.	Partner with 2 existing private shooting range facilities to secure new public recreational shooting access	Delayed, Ongoing	Staff are currently developing a partnership grant program aimed at enhancing shooting range access. As part of this initiative, staff have created a map on the agency website that highlights all ranges in Kentucky, which will serve as a valuable tool as we strategize for future range developments and partnerships.
2.6.f.	Develop at least 2 ADA-accessible facilities by June 30, 2024	Completed	The Wilgreen Lake ADA kayak launch installation was completed. The ADA archery range at department headquarters was completed.

Initiative 7	Evaluate and improve all aspects of the customer experience.	Status	July - December 2023
2.7.a.	Improve facilities at camps through replacing dated materials and equipment by Dec. 31, 2023	Ongoing	Multiple structures upgraded with new siding and roofs at Camp Earl Wallace in reporting term. New wastewater treatment plants scheduled for Camp Webb and Camp Currie.
2.7.b.	Include customer satisfaction rating questions and opportunities for open-ended feedback in all customer surveys and distribute results to applicable program staff to facilitate additional public input.	Completed, Ongoing	These questions have been incorporated into agency surveys as a standard practice.
Goal 3	Increase public awareness, engagement and partnerships		
Initiative 1	Increase transparency of management and finances.	Status	July - December 2023
3.1.a.	Publish before and after pictures of construction projects in the agency newsletter, GREAT Outdoors NEWS posts, and agency website whenever appropriate.	Ongoing	Pond River ramp at Harris Dickerson WMA and Beaver Lake have been featured within reporting term and Wilgreen Lake will soon be featured.
3.1.b.	Maintain 3-step process for proposed regulation amendments to optimize public awareness and engagement.	Ongoing	Department leadership and staff continue to propose regulations to the Fish and Wildlife Commission using the 3-step process as a matter of course.
Initiative 2	Expand participation in Kentucky Wild and opportunities for other wildlife-related activities.	Status	July - December 2023
3.2.a.	Create monthly Kentucky Wild mobile education events throughout the state.	Completed	Staff hosted Kentucky Wild member experiences or tabled community events to promote the sale of memberships and merchandise. These included: July: Hosted Center for Mollusk Conservation member experience in Frankfort; sold merchandise and memberships at Kentucky Dam Village State Resort Park. August: Tabling to promote memberships and awareness at the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville; hosted freshwater mussel tagging member experience. September: Enjoyed 5-year Anniversary Celebration for Kentucky Wild program and tabling event in Georgetown. Hosted member experience at Carter Caves State Resort Park. October: Attended Country Boy Brewing Bazaar to sell memberships and merchandise; delivered owl program to promote awareness about Kentucky Wild in Danville. November: Set up tabling to promote memberships and awareness of the program at The Wildlife Society's National Conference in Louisville. December: Attended holiday market in Lexington to sell merchandise and memberships.
3.2.b.	Create weekly content for department social media to bring awareness to species impacted by Kentucky Wild with a direct hyperlink to join.	Ongoing	Content was created weekly for the KDFWR Facebook page for Wild Wednesdays to promote memberships and the projects supported by Kentucky Wild members' support.
3.2.c.	Partner with another agency to create a Kentucky Wild event by June 30, 2023.	Completed	Kentucky Wild partnered with Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site for monarch tagging and Carter Caves State Resort Park for a bat emergence member experience.
3.2.d.	Increase annual memberships and sponsorships by 5% year over year (Calendar Year).	In Progress	2022 Memberships: 4,099 2023 Memberships: 4,259 Country Boy Brewing Sponsorship for 2023: \$20,000 retail value and included additional 3 co-hosted events.

Initiative 3	Broaden and strengthen project management collaboration with governmental, private and corporate partnerships on public and private lands.	Status	July - December 2023
3.3.a.	Schedule meetings with each reservoir managing authority annually to facilitate communication and collaboration	Ongoing	Each of the seven fisheries districts met with their major reservoir managing authorities in 2023. They discussed fish management, habitat work, and other reservoir management topics.
Initiative 4	Grow our base by expanding our education and outreach approach to reflect a changing society.	Status	July - December 2023
3.4.a.	Work with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Foundation to publish and promote the grant-funded Kentucky fishing and boating app by summer 2023.	Completed	The FishBoatKY app was published, promoted, and downloaded by the public and is in use, available on both Apple and Android.
3.4.b.	Complete and field a Request for Proposal for a license delivery system featuring a robust app and customer relationship management functions by June 30, 2023	Ongoing	RFP draft 90% complete and solicitation and advertisement expected within 1st quarter of 2024.
3.4.c.	Create a webpage cataloging how-to videos to explain fishing, hunting and boating techniques for public use, with all major species groups, fishing techniques, with meat preparation and cooking instruction, by June 30, 2023	Completed	The "Learn to Hunt" and "Learn to Fish" webpages are excellent resources for new and experienced anglers and hunters. While these cover major species groups, the content and design of these pages will continue to evolve.
3.4.d.	Continue to actively incorporate diverse participants into agency publications, website, videos and other media to communicate that everyone is welcome in Kentucky's outdoors	Ongoing	Diverse participants have been included on the website, in targeted email campaigns, through publications such as the hunting and fishing guides, Kentucky Afield Magazine, and Kentucky Afield TV.
3.4.e.	Expand, evaluate and report on annually our use of GovDelivery to capture and activate contacts to improve communications and increase sales	In Progress	I&E and Marketing staff continue utilizing GovDelivery to deliver communications and increase sales, primarily through news releases and eblasts to user groups. In 2023, more than 150 bulletins were delivered via GovDelivery. Staff continue exploring ways to work with GovDelivery to improve template design and functionality.
3.4.f.	Facilitate at least 2 fishing and 2 hunting events for new/novice adult participants annually	Completed	R3 staff conducted a total of 5 mentor hunts in 2023, including 4 collegiate hunts for deer and wild turkey (at EKU, MSU & UK), and 1 squirrel hunt that was open to the public. Additionally, staff organized a Kayak Fishing Course culminating in a fishing trip on Elkhorn, as well as a Becoming an Outdoors Woman Trout Fishing Class with fishing excursion. All other Hook and Cook classes featured a hands-on fishing component as well.
Initiative 5	Continue to develop and expand agency sponsorship programs.	Status	July - December 2023
3.5.a.	Expand sponsorships to include at least 1 sponsorship for the Fisheries Division by June 30, 2023	In Progress	Marketing division is currently pursuing contacts with International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST) network of tackle manufacturers, distributors, and fisheries non-governmental organizations who help financially support the mission and strategic planning goals of the KDFWR.
3.5.b.	Expand sponsorships to include at least 1 sponsorship for the Wildlife Division by June 30, 2023	Complete	Sponsorships secured with FoxPro, Mossy Oak, and Kentucky Gun Company.
3.5.c.	Expand sponsorships to include at least 1 sponsorship for the Information and Education Division by June 30, 2023	In Progress	Marketing Division is currently pursuing sponsorship opportunities with outside entities, events, and programs.

Initiative 6	Develop and implement a comprehensive communications strategy.	Status	July - December 2023
3.6.a.	Continue collaboration among marketing, communications, Commissioner's office, and divisional staff liaisons through weekly meetings and outreach planning activities of the communications coordination team.	In Progress	On a weekly basis, the core communications team deliberates on strategies for effective outreach concerning various aspects of the agency. Additionally, division liaisons meet with the core team every other week to provide updates on crucial topics and maintain open communication channels. We have begun producing a meeting recap that is sent to the Commissioner's Office to keep that open line of communication with them directly out of this meeting.
3.6.b.	Work collaboratively across multiple divisions to create a plan that outlines all groups working on public relations, defines their roles and establishes annual communication priorities.	In Progress	The core communications team engages in weekly meetings to discuss and assess communication priorities, actively seeking input and feedback from division liaisons and others throughout the agency. Team members also reference the strategic plan to ensure priorities align with long-range agency goals.
3.6.c.	Continue weekly meetings of the communications team including division liaisons to maintain efficient, consistent messaging across all agency communication platforms.	Ongoing	Both a core communications team or expanded communications team with division liaisons meets weekly to communicate internally and plan for external communications strategies.
3.6.d.	Share news releases and updates across multiple communications platforms.	Ongoing	News releases, Kentucky Afield Outdoors columns and special message updates continue to be shared via GovDelivery, the agency website newsfeed, and multiple social media accounts. Emerging social media platforms are considered for future additional inclusion.
3.6.e.	Promote the work of staff in multiple media platforms and increase our total reach by 10% by Dec. 31, 2023.	Completed, Ongoing	Communications and marketing staff have continued to ramp up the promotion of staff and agency accomplishments through a variety of means. A significant uptick in news media responses and requests for interviews stemming from agency news releases has required a substantial increase in time from communications staff but has resulted in much greater earned media coverage for the department. Total followers increased 11.4% on the primary agency and Kentucky Afield TV social media channels.
3.6.f.	Review and update agency uniform policy by Dec. 31, 2022 to ensure optimal branding in all staff-public interactions.	Delayed	An updated uniform policy is currently being drafted as part of a revision and update to all agency policies.
3.6.g.	Maintain at least eight social media accounts for the Fisheries Division with at least weekly posts submitted for each account.	Ongoing	The Fisheries Division currently has nine active social media accounts.
3.6.h.	Produce video and instructions to train all staff on the importance of agency branding and ambassadorship by June 30, 2023.	Delayed	This item was postponed because of delay in update to the uniform policy, but will be re-initiated early in 2024.
3.6.i.	Conduct media outreach and facilitate interviews prior to key hunting/fishing/boating timeframes.	Completed	The communications team strategically plans ahead of significant events or campaigns, ensuring the timely delivery of news releases and social media posts to maximize media coverage and audience reach, in efforts to provide helpful information to the public. Combined with the responsiveness of communications staff to media inquiries, this proactive approach also allows sufficient time for coordinating interviews with subject-matter experts.
3.6.j.	Complete update to all signage at headquarters by June 30, 2023	Completed	Agency leadership worked with engineering, design, and other staff to complete standard signage updates at headquarters.
3.6.k.	Implement a web-based electronic delivery platform for Kentucky Afield magazine to greatly expand its audience using a web-based platform and sponsorships	Ongoing/Delayed	Strong progress was being made, but we recently learned that we will need to bid out the opportunity to host our magazine online to create this web-based platform.

Initiative 7	Enhance the Department's ability to facilitate and quantify public input when making management decisions.	Status	July - December 2023
3.7.a.	Continue the new email platform for facilitating public input on Commission business by promptly distributing to members emails received on agenda items.	Ongoing	Emails containing public comments continue to come in on agency topics for Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings. This has become a popular means for stakeholders who are unable to attend commission meetings in person to communicate their opinions about pending business items.
3.7.b.	Develop and deploy a communications strategy to disability license customers regarding the transition from disability authorization cards to use of only numbers within My Profile by June 30, 2023.	Completed	This initiative was completed in summer 2023.
3.7.c.	Increase the use of customer survey question(s) at the end of transaction purchases as constructed by various shows where the agency exhibits and sells licenses, permits and Kentucky Wild memberships.	Ongoing	Continued to survey customers in-person at shows and events during the summer and fall and have continued to incorporate QR code email opt-in options at any tabling event.
3.7.d.	Activate opt-in opportunity for email subscriptions on the department's home page by June 30, 2023.	Delayed	I&E staff has consulted with GovDelivery technical support about the process of activating an opt-in opportunity on the department's homepage and tools available to do so.
3.7.e.	Fisheries Division representatives will attend at least 20 public events annually that are hosted by sportsmen's groups, NGOs or department-affiliated entities to promote two-way communications and receive public input.	Ongoing	Fisheries Division representatives attended over 20 public events including boat shows, the Kentucky State Fair, fishing events, sportsman's group meetings, an invasive carp listening session, school presentations, hatchery tours, a tackle swap meet, and many other public events.
Goal 4 Enhance the Department's responsiveness and effectiveness			
Initiative 1	Provide effective employee management and a positive work environment.	Status	July - December 2023
4.1.a.	Initiate an employee communications and morale survey by June 30, 2023.	Completed	Agency leadership and communications staff determined the best course of action was to implement a survey on communications first. The internal communications survey, aimed at identifying staff preferences for internal communications from division and department leadership and agency program staff, is planned for fielding in January-February 2024.
4.1.b.	Evaluate and enhance opportunities for staff to mentor or mentee as hunters or anglers as part of their official job duties by December 31, 2023.	Completed	An instructional guide, Employee Mentoring Program (EMP) FAQ, Mentoring Best Practices, and EMP Survey were all developed. "I Am R3" course was developed and submitted to HR on 1/3/2023 to post in training opportunities on the state employee MyPurpose website.
Initiative 2	Enhance recruitment to ensure a diverse, inclusive, well-suited workforce that relates to all customers.	Status	July - December 2023
4.2.a.	Improve programs at the camps and in the schools that will appeal to a broader range of children while maintaining our mission focus	Completed	Staff worked to update programs as necessary to align with current academic standards.

4.2.b.	Uniformed officers and other staff will attend a minimum of 2 career fairs each year and work closely with area universities to attract diverse applicants	Completed, Ongoing	Officers continue to remain interactive with the public and increase recruitment efforts. Our recruitment program is ever evolving and we have become more diverse in our approach to attract a wider range of candidates. In 2023, we developed a section to specifically target a variety of aspects involving recruitment and we anticipate its continued growth and development in year 2024.
4.2.c.	Human resources will research needs related to an internship and cooperative education program by Dec. 31, 2023, and communicate opportunities for selected majors/disciplines to all state universities in Kentucky by June 30, 2024.	Delayed	Work demands associated with a variety of nonroutine HR matters, ranging from law enforcement personnel actions to the Personnel Cabinet classification review initiative, have resulted in a delay in completion of this initiative.
4.2.d.	Human resources will enhance and keep updated the career opportunities page on the Department's website.	Ongoing	HR regularly reviews and updates the agency careers page when processing HR action steps.
Initiative 3	Offer opportunities for professional development to ensure operational effectiveness.	Status	July - December 2023
4.3.a.	Identify suitable customer service training and require of all staff beginning Jan. 1, 2023 to develop better responsiveness and communication to the public.	Delayed	Research on this topic to find suitable resources continues.
4.3.b.	Provide media relations training to Law Enforcement and other pertinent personnel by June 30, 2023.	In Progress	Plans for a media training opportunity are ongoing. By year-end 2023, agency communications staff had landed on a two-pronged approach that includes an online component followed by an in-person exercise. Outside professionals have been contacted to assist with training. These trainings would be offered to each division and Law Enforcement PIOs.
4.3.c.	Evaluate and expand employee cross training across workstations to increase operational effectiveness by June 30, 2023.	Delayed	HR Staff have been heavily tasked with "clean-up" projects from the Personnel Cabinet for various situations from years past. These projects are time sensitive and take precedence over the cross training efforts. We plan to resume cross training efforts in 2024.
4.3.d.	Increase measurably the use of on-line trainings available through My Purpose by Dec. 31, 2023.	Ongoing	Various trainings were added to MyPurpose specifically for KDFWR employees. We will continue to add courses as needed and will continue to increase the use of online trainings for KDFWR employees through the state employee MyPurpose website.
Initiative 4	Improve private lands, water conservation and stream and wetland restoration programs.	Status	July - December 2023
4.4.a.	Work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help landowners take advantage of the conservation provisions of the federal Farm Bill	Ongoing	We continue to work with landowners to take advantage of NRCS and other cost share programs that help them establish habitat on their property.
4.4.b.	Implement communications about the WMA Management Levels by Dec. 31, 2022	Completed	Completed previously and communications about management levels are ongoing through signage, hunting guide publications and webpages.
4.4.c.	Update content and add informational videos to the Pond Management section of the website by Dec. 31, 2023	In Progress	Information available on the website for major topics needs to be converted to script.

Initiative 5	Enhance revenue streams and operating budget to adequately address fish and wildlife conservation and recreation needs of the Commonwealth.	Status	July - December 2023
4.5.a.	Increase operating budget to accommodate more FILO projects being implemented operationally via contracting, implementation of federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act (if passed by U.S. Congress), and other changes necessitated by statutory or other requirements	In Progress	The new biennial budget proposal will be submitted in January 2024.
4.5.b.	Identify and evaluate feasible new revenue sources (both immediate and additional) to meet budgetary needs through an internal Alternative Income Working Group by June 30, 2023	Completed	A proposal to create "special agency fundraising permits" similar to some states' "Super Tags" and similar drawings was recommended by the Alternative Income Working Group. Additional means of potential new funding are being researched.
4.5.c.	Begin implementing new immediate revenue sources by June 30, 2024 and initiate steps required to implement additional new revenue sources.	In Progress	A new regulation is being promulgated to facilitate the "special agency fundraising permits" application and award process.
Goal 5 Protect Kentucky's fish and wildlife resources and promote user safety			
Initiative 1	Control, reduce and eradicate invasive species.	Status	July - December 2023
5.1.a.	Work to identify locations of and eradicate invasive species on WMAs, beginning with "high management level" areas in this biennium.	Ongoing	Completed 4,380 acres of noxious vegetation on WMAs across the state, including completing the second aerial herbicide application covering another 600 acres of Clay WMA and the first aerial herbicide application in southeast Kentucky, controlling invasive autumn olive. Currently soliciting a vendor to complete an aerial spray project at Rockcastle River WMA.
5.1.b.	Work with 5 private/public landowners in each region through partnerships to control and reduce invasive species in to an acceptable level by Dec. 31, 2024.	Completed	Through our private lands program, we have successfully worked with five or more private landowners in each region to control and/or reduce invasive species to an acceptable level.
5.1.c.	Update the Statewide Aquatic Nuisance Species Plan for Kentucky by June 30, 2023	In Progress	Fisheries Division hired an ANS Coordinator to begin the process of renewing the Kentucky ANS Plan. Meetings were held with USFWS on the process to establish a new multi-agency task force.
5.1.d.	Continue to work with private industry to increase removal of invasive carp to 20 million pounds annually by Dec. 31, 2023.	In Progress	Staff coordinated an Invasive Carp Listening Session to discuss challenges and successes of the harvest programs. The meeting facilitated discussions between processors, fishers, and government agencies. A record of more than 13 million pounds was harvested in 2023.
Initiative 2	Increase public safety for hunting, fishing, boating and recreational shooting.	Status	July - December 2023
5.2.a.	Conservation officers will routinely patrol public hunting and fishing areas and the public waterways of the state each year, observing for unsafe conditions and illegal activity	Completed, Ongoing	Officers are patrolling high activity public access areas at peak times daily during their assigned patrol shift. These efforts coincide with our service mission to the commonwealth and our agency mission to protect Kentucky's natural resources.

5.2.b.	Establish 5 additional life jacket loaner stations across the state by June 30, 2023	Completed	The number of life jacket loaner stations set forth in this goal (five) has been completed, and our effort will continue.
5.2.c.	Ensure safety and improve access to public waters by maintaining statewide boat ramps, launch sites, dams and fishing sites, and informational signage to educate the public and promote safe use	Ongoing	Engineering, Infrastructure & Technology Division staff routinely inspect statewide, agency owned facilities and perform maintenance as needed. Informational signage is inspected and replaced or revised as required, per site.
Initiative 3	Protect fish and wildlife resources through increased regulation compliance.	Status	July - December 2023
5.3.a.	Conservation officers will increase the annual number of compliance checks conducted by 10% by June 30, 2023	Completed, Ongoing	Officer contacts have been continuously increasing in recent years and this will continue to be a division priority.
5.3.b.	The Law Enforcement Division will continue to promote public assistance with regulation compliance by offering 24-hour dispatch service through Kentucky State Police referral system.	Ongoing	This is an ongoing effort with anticipated additional KSP Dispatch training to occur during 2024.
5.3.c.	The Law Enforcement Division will continue to promote public assistance with regulation compliance by offering Tip411	Completed, Ongoing	Tip411 promotion and usage increased greatly during the fall of 2023. This increase is due to an agency initiative to better promote and educate the public about the crime reporting resource. We will continue to campaign throughout 2024 and are excited to see its popularity and usage grow.
5.3.d.	The Law Enforcement Division will continue to promote public assistance with regulation compliance through social media channels	Completed, Ongoing	Our LE Division Facebook page was launched in 2023 and the following has grown exponentially in the last 6 months. Our staff has taken a targeted approach to provide the public with an array of information surrounding public outreach and enforcement. We will continue our efforts to inform and educate the public about regulation compliance and our agency enforcement efforts through our social media channels in 2024.
Initiative 4	Provide professional conservation law enforcement services to the Commonwealth through mission-focused policing.	Status	July - December 2023
5.4.a.	Maintain all levels of supervision across the Law Enforcement Division by promptly filling any supervisor vacancies that occur	Completed, Ongoing	This initiative was completed in 2023 by promptly promoting the position of LE director and two positions of assistant director. The process was completed for captain positions and those assignments become official in January 2024. Additional promotions to the ranks of lieutenant and sergeant will be quickly forthcoming in 2024.
5.4.b.	Require a minimum of 6 detailed and organized Law Enforcement operations from each district during peak seasons to ensure mission-focused efforts	Completed, Ongoing	This is an ongoing approach to mission focused LE strategy to maximize enforcement and teamwork. With seasonal guided planning, field supervisors will continue to organize effective operational plans to enhance officer resource protection and public education and exceed six organized field operation details annually.
Initiative 5	Promulgate clear and concise fish and wildlife regulations for anglers, hunters, trappers and boaters.	Status	July - December 2023
5.5.a.	Work closely with the Commission and internally across applicable division lines to ensure the regulations are concise, not in conflict with Kentucky Revised Statutes, and enforceable	Ongoing	The agency's regulations coordinator has worked closely with legal, division leadership and program staff to promulgate all regulations in a timely fashion. The backlog in regulations recommended by the Fish and Wildlife Commission but not yet filed has been eliminated.

5.5.b.	Provide the Commission with clear and concise regulation recommendations for the take of fish and wildlife species	Ongoing	The Commissioner's Office has spearheaded work with division leadership and program staff to make proposals as clear as possible for commission members and the public to understand and act upon.
Initiative 6			
	Enact proactive measures in response to existing and emerging fish and wildlife health threats.	Status	July - December 2023
5.6.a.	Continue surveillance efforts for the Asian longhorned tick (<i>Haemaphysalis longicornis</i>), particularly in high-risk counties	Ongoing	The Wildlife Health Program provided an update to the Wildlife Division in May 2023. This report highlights critical counties where wildlife surveillance for the Asian Longhorned tick (ALT) is needed. The Asian Longhorned tick has been detected in ten counties including (Barren, Breathitt, Boone, Floyd, Garrard, Laurel, Madison, Martin, Metcalfe, and Perry). Additionally, a novel pathogen associated with this tick, <i>Theilaria orientalis</i> Ikeda, has been detected in several counties, including Allen, Barren, Fleming, Green, Larue, and Lyon. The Wildlife Health Program participates in a Kentucky Tick Working Group consisting of multiple state and federal partners, including the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Kentucky Department of Public Health, USDA Veterinary Services, and University researchers. The Wildlife Health Program was awarded a USFWS Zoonotic Disease Initiative grant that will fund a 3-year tick surveillance project on a Wildlife Management Area in each of the five regions. The project will identify ticks and associated tick-borne pathogens in effort to better understand the risk they pose to KDFWR staff and the public.
5.6.b.	Continue Chronic Wasting Disease prevention and surveillance activities	Ongoing	Statewide Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance is ongoing in wild cervids in the commonwealth. In December 2023, the first detection of CWD was confirmed from a hunter-harvested 2.5 year old male white-tailed deer from Ballard County, Kentucky. The detection in Ballard County triggered expansion of the surveillance zone. The Wildlife Health Program is working to establish the prevalence and distribution around the detection in Ballard County. Successful hunters from Ballard, Carlisle, and McCracken that harvested a deer in 2023-2024 hunt year were contacted to determine their location of harvest. Currently, there is an insufficient amount of data from around the known positive to determine the prevalence of the disease. Additionally, Tennessee confirmed via IHC another CWD detection in Henry County, Tennessee within 17 miles of the Kentucky border. The original surveillance zone created in 2021 in response to a detection in Henry County should be maintained to enhance surveillance in this high-risk area. The Wildlife Health Program maintains a veterinary diagnostic contract with Murray State University's Breathitt Veterinary Center for CWD testing. The CWD Incident Command is working to finalize recommendations for the Fish and Wildlife Commission's review and approval for the upcoming CWD surveillance year 2024-2025.
5.6.c.	Continue ongoing elk surveillance and health assessments	Ongoing	The Wildlife Health Program, in collaboration with the Elk Program, has been collecting livers from hunter-harvested animals and elk mortalities. Over the past three years, the department has collected more than 150 liver samples. An additional 100 samples are expected to be submitted for diagnostic testing in the spring of 2024. Once the pending samples have been tested, a comprehensive analysis of the results is planned for the summer and fall of 2024. Interest in understanding the role dietary trace mineral deficiencies have on elk population health is growing with support from several states in the Eastern United States with elk populations including Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Virginia, Tennessee, and Missouri.
5.6.d.	Continue review and response of wildlife to COVID-19	In Progress	KDFWR participated in the USDA's multistate SARS-CoV-2 surveillance in white-tailed deer for the the past two years. There were no new detections in the second year of testing. A third year of sampling coordinated by USDA is planned for the winter 2023. In 2023, USDA provided funding for additional SARS-CoV-2 surveillance in wildlife rehabilitation. A request was received by the University of Florida to test wildlife in Kentucky. Regulation 301 KAR 2:075 does not allow wildlife rehabilitators to participate in research on wildlife undergoing rehabilitation. However, this does not prevent testing on animals that die or are euthanized. The results from this USDA funded study are still pending.

5.6.e.	Continue monitoring and surveillance of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease	Ongoing	The Wildlife Health Program continues to investigate suspicious wild rabbit mortalities. To date, RHDV-2 has not been detected in wild rabbits in Kentucky. There have been no new domestic rabbit cases since the initial detection in December 2021. Continued surveillance is critical as domestic rabbit cases continue to be detected in the eastern United States and an ongoing outbreak in wild rabbits is being observed in the Southwest.
5.6.f.	Pursue federal grants or other sources of funding for increasing capacity of disease monitoring and abatement	Completed	The Wildlife Health Program was awarded a USFWS Zoonotic Disease Initiative Grant in the amount of \$683,697 over three years. The award has funded a wildlife health communication specialist, the development of a wildlife health database including hiring a database developer. Several disease surveillance projects and a fish health contract are funded through this grant. Additionally, the Wildlife Health Program in collaboration with the Furbearer program submitted a grant proposal for a AFWA Multistate Conservation Grant (MSCG) through SCWDS to better understand the health of muskrat populations.
Initiative 7			
	Promote safe and enjoyable experiences for all recreational boaters.	Status	July - December 2023
5.7.a.	Conservation officers will spend a minimum of 30% of their patrol hours on public waterways surveilling for violations and unsafe conditions	Completed, Ongoing	Officers continue to spend substantial time patrolling waterways to ensure public safety and opportunities for all on Kentucky waters. In 2024, we will continue our dedication to waterway safety and intend to expand our initiatives.
5.7.b.	A minimum of 3 public safety announcements will be produced or activated each year to focus on the most dangerous aspects of boating to increase public awareness and safety compliance	Completed, Ongoing	Currently our team has provided multiple boating-safety related public service announcements, some of which include operation dry water impaired boating, effects of cold water entry, and hot weather on the water awareness concerns. In 2024, we plan to increase our public service announcements and work closely with the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) to enhance our outreach efforts.
5.7.c.	The boating education coordinator will teach a minimum of 10 boating education classes annually in multiple locations (or virtually) across the state in 2022 and 2023.	Completed	Boating Education Coordinator Officer Bowling has completed more than 15 boating education classes in 2023.



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