



Faith Bernstein

# THE CONFLUENCE



—SWAN VALLEY—  
CONNECTIONS  
Celebrating 20 Years!

FALL 2017

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings New Friends!

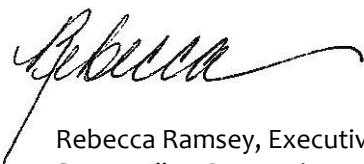
Late the night of September 17, I rolled into Condon with my three dogs and all my belongings in a horse trailer, ready to start my new position with Swan Valley Connections on the morning of September 18. I pulled up my roots from the Ruby Valley of Southwest Montana, where I lived for 19 years.

I've visited the Swan Valley many times, and have been awe struck by the beauty and integrity of the natural resources, and inspired by the collaborative conservation that has been done here – work that set the example for what I've been doing for the last nine years. However, I have not had the opportunity to spend much time with the humans who live here.

Four days after I arrived in the Swan, the dogs took themselves on a “self-guided tour” of their surroundings. Evora returned home in a few hours, but the boys were gone overnight. I quickly learned about the beauty and integrity of the human community as well. Staff members connected me to the local Facebook group page, where people shared the post widely and sent messages of support and assistance. Community and staff members took it upon themselves to spread the word and go looking for them. Ultimately, a local hunter picked them up and connected with Maria (Mantas) on her way into work to get them to me. I am so grateful for this community!

I can't wait to continue meeting you all, learning about the natural and cultural resources of this area, and letting my roots grow deep into this beautiful place. I am thrilled to join you, and to join this organization in connecting our community further through education about, and conservation of, one of the most valuable landscapes in the country.

Warmly,



Rebecca Ramsey, Executive Director  
Swan Valley Connections



### Swan Valley Connections

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<https://SwanValleyConnections.org>





*Field trip with the USFS and the Lindbergh Lake HOA to look at the USFS Beaver Creek Project*

Much of SVC's conservation work in the Swan Valley is rooted in partnerships. Joining forces with other nonprofits and government agencies increases efficiency and allows us to share resources and expertise to more effectively address critical conservation issues. Whether we are working with other nonprofits like the Blackfoot Challenge, Clearwater Resource Council, Flathead Biological Station, MPG Ranch, Swan Lakers, and the University of MT, or with government agencies such as the US Forest Service, Montana DNRC, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, these partnerships are critical to our shared success. Through these relationships SVC has helped restore and treat thousands of forest and wetland acres and many miles of streams and rivers. One of our most successful partnerships is Swan Valley Bear Resources (SVBR), a collaborative effort with the USFS since 2007 that provides critical information and resources to minimize conflict and promote coexistence between people and bears. Read more about SVBR's work in their "2017 Year in Review" on page six.

Partnerships often develop through "collaboratives," which are groups and individuals focused on a particular resource or issue. The Swan Lands Coordinating Network brings stakeholders in the valley together, acting as an umbrella for subcommittees that identify and implement specific conservation activities. A great example is the Native Fish Committee that works on Westslope Cutthroat Trout conservation with MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, USFS, USGS,

and local residents. Everyone comes to the table to identify needs such as conducting a genetic analysis to pinpoint the locations of pure strains of the species, or conserving habitat by limiting the migration of exotic fish. These groups discuss the issues, develop an action plan, secure funds, and implement tasks. A favorite saying here at SVC is "many hands make light work" - so true when measuring the effectiveness of our collaboratives.

SVC is also an active member of the Southwestern Crown of the Continent Collaborative, a consortium that brings together residents, interested citizens, business enterprises, and conservation organizations to consider creative solutions in the management of National Forests in the Blackfoot, Clearwater, and Swan River valleys. This group, open to all, promotes sustainable forest management, the restoration of watersheds, science-based evaluation of management activities, and opportunities for nearby rural communities to benefit from these lands and waters.

Over the years our partnerships and collaborations continue to grow. Check out our website for the complete list of our partners at <https://SwanValleyConnections.org/collaboration>. Collaborative gatherings are open to anyone who wants to come. We hope you will consider joining us as a partner in conservation!



# LANDSCAPE AND LIVELIHOOD

## An Exploration Into The Working Landscapes Of Northwest Montana

The 2017 class of Landscape and Livelihood immersed quickly into the complexities of the rural Montana environment and the dynamic weather patterns of the Swan Valley. With the Rice Ridge, Liberty, and Lolo Peak wildfires burning, our six students from across the nation witnessed firsthand the strength of our rural communities, the challenges of managing public and private lands in fire-adapted ecosystems, and the need to be adaptable when planning activities in this landscape. When summer and fall suddenly make way for winter in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, backpacking under stage 2 fire restrictions that prohibit campfires make for cold, wet nights.

Wildfire necessitated adjustments to both our program schedule and the schedules of many of our course contributors who were lending their time to fire suppression efforts. The fires also inspired effective experiential education opportunities. We adapted our curriculum to the environment and focused on strategies for risk management, community resilience, private forestry management, watershed-fire interactions, and plant and animal responses to disturbance on the landscape. Just as the serotinous cones of the lodgepole pine open in response to fire, so did the minds of the Landscape and Livelihood students as they were exposed to the social, environmental, and managerial effects of wildfire.

Other notable lessons from the landscape came from a wintery backpacking trip into the Swan Mountains, where we witnessed pack strings of mules and horses traveling through the falling snow, weighted down with the season's harvest. Snorkeling in the Swan River showed us the importance of woody debris, cold mountain water, and low sediment loads to the health of native and threatened bull trout. Finally, community work days have resulted in multiple cords of wood delivered to our neighbors and fresh-picked summer vegetables transformed into jars of tasty salsa in local cupboards.

There is much yet to learn and see, but the Swan Valley continues to offer the greatest classroom, with our community as the best instructors. A big thank you from our staff and students to everyone who has shared their time, knowledge, and experience. Your contributions are shaping the future of conservation.





## A SEASON OF WILDFIRE

Now that the 2017 fire season is finally over, we can literally all breathe a little easier. Over one million acres burned, about 1% of the total land mass area in the state. State and federal fire-fighting costs were \$378 million in Montana alone, making this the most expensive fire season in 18 years. Nearly nine million acres burned nationally this year, 47% higher than the 10-year average. To the north, almost three million acres burned in British Columbia, the largest area ever recorded in the province.

Given the many opinions and myths surfacing during and after this epic wildfire season, we'd like to share some facts about fire ecology and forest management.

In the northern Rockies fires were historically a natural occurrence on the landscape. In fact, most plants, animals, and soils have evolved and are adapted to fire, some even being dependent on fire as part of their natural life cycle. Some forest types (low elevation ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir) evolved with frequent, low intensity fires, whereas others (lodgepole pine) evolved with all-consuming, stand-replacing events.

However, a strong body of research now indicates that due to a warmer climate fire seasons are becoming dryer and longer. Matt Jolly, Ph.D., Forestry, at the University of Montana says, "The change we found comes in two forms: steady long-term increase in fire season length.... and an increase in the frequency of extremely long fire seasons." This obviously creates conditions that favor more frequent and larger wildfires.

There is little doubt that suppressing naturally caused wildfires over the last 100 years has led to uncharacteristic fuel loading. Combined with the longer and drier fire seasons, we are now seeing larger and more frequent fires. Although thinning trees can help reduce forest fuels, forest thinning doesn't necessarily stop fire. It can, however, reduce fire severity and intensity and create safer and more effective firefighting conditions.



*Climate change continues to alter the way we manage fire*

According to Andrew Larson, professor of Forest Ecology at the University of Montana, "In low-elevation forests, where ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch dominate, fuel reduction treatments should be designed to restore forest structure and composition of fuel loads, so they are effective at changing potential fire behavior and effects." Fuels reduction programs for private lands, which tend to be within these drier forest types, can be an effective tool for reducing the risk to homes and property.

We know that fire will always be a natural disturbance process in our forested region and that this type of management is challenging in large expanses of forested lands. Landscapes can, however, be managed to help reduce the inevitable reoccurrence of fires by using a combination of mechanical thinning, prescribed fire, and managed wildfire and by applying knowledge of historic fire regimes to favor long-lived fire-resistant trees and a mosaic of young and older forests.





# SWAN VALLEY BEAR RESOURCES YEAR IN REVIEW

Several Swan Valley Connections staff are members of Swan Valley Bear Resources (SVBR), a collaborative group that also involves the U.S. Forest Service. SVBR offers resources that help minimize bear conflicts on both private and public properties in fulfillment of its mission to promote human/bear coexistence in the Swan Valley. Resources available through SVBR include a bear-resistant garbage container loaner program, electric fencing assistance, property consultations, educational materials, informational events, and the Swan Valley Bear Ranger program.



**Luke Lamar (SVBR) building an electric fence**

2017 has been a busy year for SVBR, particularly with the demand for electric fencing to secure bear attractants. SVBR works with private landowners on fence design and specifications, helps secure funding sources, purchases materials, and ultimately helps to construct a permanent electric fence for the landowner. The SVBR team has already built three permanent electric fences in the Swan Valley this year, as well as upgraded another existing fence to meet necessary specifications to exclude grizzly bears. SVBR has now built 15 permanent electric fences in the Swan Valley, securing chickens, turkeys, rabbits, goats, sheep, pigs, bees, livestock grain, outside chest freezers, orchards, and gardens from bears.

Local resident Sheri Burden summed up her personal experience with bears and attractants in the Swan Valley: "SVBR helped us build an electric fence around the garden and apple trees several years ago after a grizzly and cubs destroyed one of our apple trees. The electric fence has worked fine since then. We just this morning watched a small black bear, dark brown in color, walk around our garden at least two times without an attempt at getting our apples. He was obviously interested. Thank you Swan Valley Bear Resources!"



**Adam Lieberg (SVBR) discussing electric fencing with local resident**

In addition to providing direct assistance to private landowners, SVBR partners with various agencies and organizations each year to provide educational events aimed at promoting human-bear coexistence. SVBR hosted a Spring Bear Wake-Up Social at the Swan River community hall in April that featured presentations by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks grizzly bear management specialists Tim Manley and Mike Madel. The event serves as an annual reminder for residents to contain their bear attractants as bears emerge from hibernation. This was the first Spring Bear Wake Up Social in the greater Ferndale area, and was well attended by an estimated 75 local residents.

In June, SVBR hosted its popular summer event, the Bear Fair, at the Condon community hall. The event brought together regional bear experts, organizations, and companies to share information about bear ecology, behavior, research, conservation, conflict management, and different resources available to secure bear attractants. Special thanks to the Swan Valley Cafe for providing mouthwatering pizza, and Big Sky Brewing for donating great beer. Presenters were Lori Roberts (Research Biologist, FWP), Jennifer Fortin-Noreus (Grizzly Bear Recovery Office, FWS), and Tim Manley (Bear Management Specialist, FWP), who gave informative talks on the most up-to-date grizzly bear research, recreation management, and conflict management. The Vital Ground Foundation, a primary supporter of SVBR's work, participated in the Fair, as did Counter Assault, Montana's Outdoor Legacy Foundation, Center for Wildlife Information, Defenders of Wildlife (another SVBR supporter), Montana Land Reliance, and CHS. All offered informative displays, educational materials, and demonstrations about bear pepper spray use and effectiveness, bear-resistant trash cans, electric fencing, habitat linkage zones, conservation easements, and how to live in bear country. Approximately 150 people attended the event throughout the day.



**Tim Manley (FWP), Luke Lamar (SVBR), and Landowner standing in front of the completed electric fence to secure chickens and garden**

To learn more about how Swan Valley Bear Resources can help you, please visit our webpage at <https://SwanValleyConnections.org/swan-valley-bear-resources/> or contact us at 406.754.3137.



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR BEAR FAIR!



*Chuck Bartlebaugh from Center for Wildlife Information (CWI) offering advice about how to live in bear country*



*Chuck Bartlebaugh (CWI) demonstrating how to properly deploy bear pepper spray*



*Lori Roberts (FWP) giving a presentation on grizzly bear research*



*Youngsters checking out bear hides*



*Tim Manley (FWP) giving a presentation showing a slide of grizzly bear points within a 5 mile radius of the Swan Valley Community Hall*



*The SVBR team de-briefing after the event*

### **Bear Troubles? Contact:**

To report grizzly bear conflicts you can contact Tim Manley at 406.250.1265 or [tmanley@mt.gov](mailto:tmanley@mt.gov)

If you want more information on living in bear country you can visit the MT FWP website at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/beBearAware/default.html>

Swan Valley Bear Resources at: <https://www.SwanValleyConnections.org/swan-valley-bear-resources>

Defenders of Wildlife can also assist with electric fencing and they can be contacted at: <http://www.defenders.org/got-grizzlies>





## **Laura Cannon** **Archaeological Consultant**

Laura has a Master's degree in Anthropology and Archaeology from the University of Wyoming. Her interests include prehistoric hunter-gatherer mobility patterns, behavioral responses to aridity, and the use of high-altitude landscapes. She conducts archaeological survey for various NEPA projects for the Flathead National Forest through Swan Valley Connections. Her projects have kept her very busy since she moved here in July, but she is looking forward to spending more time hiking, fishing, and skiing in the valley.



## **Rebecca Ramsey** **Executive Director**

Rebecca is originally from St. Louis, Missouri, and first came to Montana in 1984 with her grandparents when she declared "I'm moving to Montana!" She moved to the Ruby Valley in 1998, and is excited to be fulfilling her dream of living among the trees in the Swan Valley.

She has a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications with an emphasis in Public Relations and minors in Journalism and Equestrian Science. Her professional experience is wide ranging, including the last nine years as the Ruby Watershed Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator for the Red Ants Pants Music Festival, and Executive Director of the Virginia City Area Chamber of Commerce.

Rebecca is passionate about conservation of natural resources & preservation of rural life, live music, and being an ambassador of love. She enjoys hiking, cross country skiing, fly fishing & horseback riding with her pack of standard poodles, as well as great local food and fine local spirits. She is a dedicated traveler, and has volunteered with the Montana Dental Outreach Team to provide services in rural Jamaica and the Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

## EXPLORE MONTANA'S SWAN VALLEY MAP AND GUIDE

Our Swan Valley Map and Guide contains interpretive narratives accompanied by historic photos, watercolor artwork, and professional landscape and wildlife photos to showcase the valley's glacial legacy, its rich human history and culture, and the natural values that make it so special today. The map and guide is available for purchase online at <https://SwanValleyConnections.org> and in our office at the Condon Work Center.



# Wildfire Risk?



## **Fuels Reduction FUNDS AVAILABLE for privately- owned, forested lands**

For more information:

### **(406) 754-3137**

**[SwanValleyConnections.org/Forest-Stewardship](https://SwanValleyConnections.org/Forest-Stewardship)**



# AIS MONITORING

This summer Swan Valley Connections began our Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) monitoring program in collaboration with the Missoula County Weed District, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), Clearwater Resource Council, and the Blackfoot Challenge. This program is in response to the suspect identification of two invasive mussel species, quagga and zebra mussels, in Tiber and Canyon Ferry Reservoirs east of the Continental Divide. Before this detection last October, Montana was one of five states in the lower 48 still free of these invasive species. The other states, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming, are all part of the Columbia River watershed.

Once invasive mussel species establish colonies in lakes, they can bring harm to our native species by out-competing them for food and habitat and by introducing disease. They can completely cover lake bottoms and shorelines, making it dangerous to walk due to their knife-edge shells. They can damage equipment (hydroelectric dams, water intake systems, irrigation pipes, boat engines, etc.) by coating and clogging pipes. The negative impacts of zebra and quagga mussels could ultimately destroy local economies that rely on pristine lake ecosystems for tourism/recreation revenue and in turn require millions of taxpayer dollars to contain.



***Display showing how Quagga mussels can colonize on and clog pipes***



***Caitlin Mitchell collecting water samples from Lindbergh Lake to test for AIS***

Since mid-July, SVC has been collecting water samples from Holland, Lindbergh, Van, and Swan Lakes to assist in early detection of quagga and zebra mussels should they find their way into our pristine watershed. Because the mussels tend to colonize shorelines and lake bottoms, we take surface samples by towing a net across sensitive areas including inlets, outlets, and boat launches. We also take deep-hole samples by adding weights to the net and dropping it to within 5-10 feet of the lake bottom, so as not to stir up any sediment that could clog the sample. Once the samples are processed they are sent to the FWP biology lab to be analyzed under a microscope.

Our preventative monitoring efforts have been greatly assisted by local boater volunteers, who have stepped up to protect their prized public waterbodies. Please help our efforts by practicing Clean, Drain, Dry (<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/habitat/ais/prevention.html>) when you move your watercraft from one area to another. You are always welcome to call or stop in the Condon work center with any questions. An informed and proactive community is the best way to conserve our precious waterbodies.



# SHINTANGLE BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER FOR SQUARE DANCING

By LUCY TOMPKINS of the Missoulian  
July 29, 2017

*With a ballfield for a dance floor, surrounded by pine trees and flanked by the Swan and Mission mountains, a small community gathered recently for an evening celebration with an old-time tradition.*

*Couples of all ages stood in squares on the field just off a U.S. Forest Service airstrip and listened for instructions from the caller on stage:*

*“Couple One lead out to the right*

*Circle to the left with all your might,*

*Put the Bird in the Cage and shut the door.*

*Bird fly out and the crow hops in,*

*Crow fly out and everyone swing!”...*

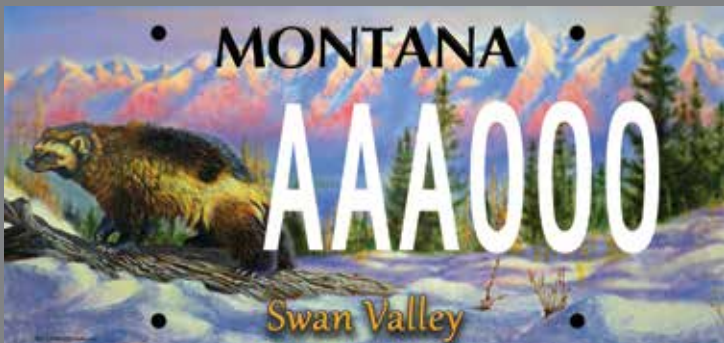
**For Shintangle highlights and to continue reading the Missoulian article go to <https://SwanValleyConnections.org/shintangle>.**



## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SHINTANGLE RAFFLE PRIZE WINNERS:

**Dixie Meyer** - Blued lodgepole & ponderosa pine headboard handmade by Pam and Dan Hamilton; **Marie Geisler** - Half day on the Lower Swan River with SVC's Jonathan Bowler; **Aiden Martorana** - Mountain goat and ptarmigan photos prints by Cory DeStein; **Jeff Kemp** - 10 yards of ¾" minus road mix gravel donated by JRD Enterprises; **Leo Perkins** - Dinner for two plus a bottle of wine at The Laughing Horse Lodge; and **Apryll Verboven** - \$50 gift card to Swan River Gardens donated by CLB Landworks.

## GET YOUR WOLVERINE! PURCHASE A SWAN VALLEY LICENSE PLATE



Support conservation and education efforts in Montana's wild and beautiful Swan Valley. The Swan Valley license plate features a spectacular painting of a wolverine in its natural habitat by renowned artist Ron Ukrainetz. For details on how to purchase a license plate visit <https://SwanValleyConnections.org/swan-valley-license-plate>. Sample plates (not legal for use on a vehicle) are also available.

## **Support Swan Valley Connections**

When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)  
Amazon donates.



AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support Swan Valley Connections every time you shop, at no cost to you! When you shop at [http://smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), you'll find the exact same selection as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization - that's us! Consider signing up, it only takes a few clicks.





A CONFLUENCE OF CONSERVATION AND LEARNING

Friend of the Swan Valley,

Fall is a glorious time of year in the Swan Valley. As our lush green landscape turns to gold, we're reminded that the year is coming to an end. Before it does, I want to invite you to join us in celebrating 20 years of conservation, education, and collaboration in the Swan Valley. To mark this significant milestone, a longtime donor has made us a generous offer: a gift of \$20,000 if we can raise an equal amount from supporters like you. Please join us in rising up to the challenge together!

Twenty years ago, a Swan Valley couple and a few friends came together with a shared vision to provide college students with a meaningful education experience by getting them out of the classroom and into the field. Around the same time, another group of local conservationists were also working to provide resources to local residents that connected them to the landscape and to each other. In 2016 those organizations, Northwest Connections and Swan Ecosystem Center, joined together to form Swan Valley Connections (SVC), believing they would be even more effective if they moved forward together. And, they were correct! Since the merger in January 2016, SVC has become the best of both by providing world-class experiential education to college students, assisting with wildlife conflict prevention, restoring wildlife and native fish habitat and wetlands, and serving as a model for both conservation education and work on the ground in areas far beyond the Swan.

As we celebrate the past and honor the founders of our parent organizations, we also look toward the future, and building on the foundation provided for another 20 years of conservation leadership. Throughout the next few months, we will be hosting various celebratory events, both here in Condon and online. We will keep you updated on the website, via email, or through our Facebook page and Instagram feed. We invite you to join us from wherever you are.

Please help us spread the word about our 20th anniversary celebration and the \$20,000 challenge by forwarding and sharing this month's electronic newsletter and share our Facebook page with your friends! It's only through connecting that we're able to do this important work and it will only be through sharing that we will meet our goal of raising \$20,000 before the end of the year. You can go to <https://SwanValleyConnections.org/giving> to make a donation at any time! You may also use the enclosed envelope to mail a check.

I'm thrilled to be joining an organization with such a rich history at such a pivotal time. Thank you for being our partner in conservation and for helping us celebrate our first 20 years. Here's to the next 20.

Cheers,

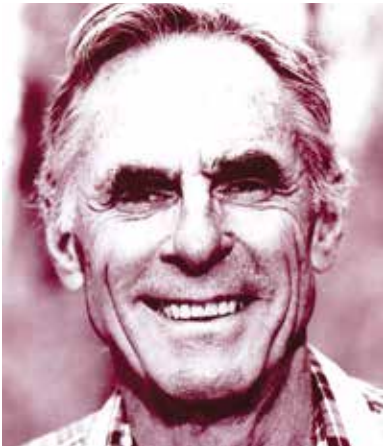
Rebecca Ramsey, Executive Director  
Swan Valley Connections



# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS!

## **20th Anniversary Celebration Wed., Dec. 6th, 5:30 - 7:30 pm at Swan Valley Community Hall**

Be sure to stop by the Swan Valley Community Hall for appetizers, hot cider, adult beverages, and holiday cheer as we honor the founders of our parent organizations and 20 years of collaborative conservation and experiential education! Free. Everyone is welcome.



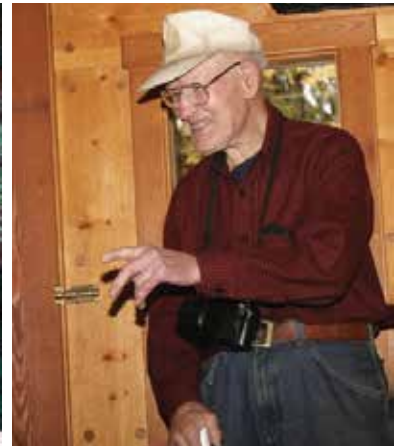
**Rod Ash**



**Anne Dahl**



**Neil Meyer**



**Bud Moore**



**Art Ortenberg**



**Melanie Parker**



**Tom Parker**

As we acknowledge the founding members of Northwest Connections and Swan Ecosystem Center, we would also like to thank the many, many wonderful people who have helped foster and support both organizations throughout the years. Thank you all.

# Support Swan Valley Connections

Make your check out to "SVC" and send to:  
**Swan Valley Connections, 6887 MT Hwy 83, Condon, MT 59826-9005**  
or, donate online: [SwanValleyConnections.org](http://SwanValleyConnections.org)

Swan Valley Connections is a 501(c)3 non profit - all gifts are tax deductible  
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