
Cross Border Partnerships in Protected Areas Management: Northwestern Ontario – Eastern Manitoba

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Abstract

Discussions of cross-border partnerships typically refer to partnerships that cross administrative boundaries such as provincial and international borders and the inside/outside of park borders. Equally important in the planning and management of protected areas in Ontario, however, is the crossing of cultural borders – especially those shared with First Nations. This paper describes three examples – the proposed Manitoba–Ontario Interprovincial Wilderness Area, the proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site Pimachiowin–Aki and the Pikangikum First Nation–Ontario Parks Partnership in Innovation and Opportunity. Each of these involves crossing borders of provinces and of cultures. A range of processes, opportunities, challenges and benefits are discussed in each case. Together, they illustrate the potential for collaboration and respect to facilitate the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

Introduction

When hearing the term *cross border*, one usually pictures an administrative boundary of some kind – one that is easily depicted on a map. Provincial boundaries, regulated protected area boundaries and international boundaries are ones that quickly come to mind. When crossing these borders, one understands that different rules may apply, ranging from permit fees in provincial parks to speed limits on Provincial highways. Another cross border situation that cannot be as easily identified – especially on a map – is that of a cultural border. When crossing cultural borders, different rules or protocols also exist. Learning, respecting and practicing these protocols is integral to furthering a relationship or entering into a partnership.

This paper introduces three cross border protected area partnerships: 1) Manitoba – Ontario Interprovincial Wilderness Area; 2) Pimachiowin – Aki, a proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site; and 3) Partnership in Innovation and Opportunity – Pikangikum First Nation – Ontario Parks.

In these three examples, relationships are formed between Provincial and First Nations Governments resulting in partnerships crossing Provincial and cultural borders.

Manitoba – Ontario Interprovincial Wilderness Area

Manitoba and Ontario share a common border and have contiguous regulated parklands in Atikaki (1985), South Atikaki (2005), Nopiming (1976), and Woodland Caribou Provincial Parks (1983). Along side these protected areas are five additional protected lands, including the four recommended park additions to Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and the Eagle - Snowshoe Conservation Reserve, both in Ontario (Figure 1). In total this area will represent an immense area of natural, cultural and wilderness value encompassing more than one million hectares.

In recognition of the national and international ecological importance of this boreal wilderness area, and with the intent of enhancing park management opportunities, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Manitoba Conservation propose to establish an interprovincial wilderness area encompassing the aforementioned protected areas with the strong possibility of adding adjacent protected areas in the future. The two provincial government departments are committed to work together to conserve the ecological integrity of the area while respecting and maintaining their separate jurisdictions. In creating and co-operatively managing this cluster of parks and wilderness lands as a single land mass, conservation of an integral part of Canada's central boreal uplands would be strengthened now and in the future.

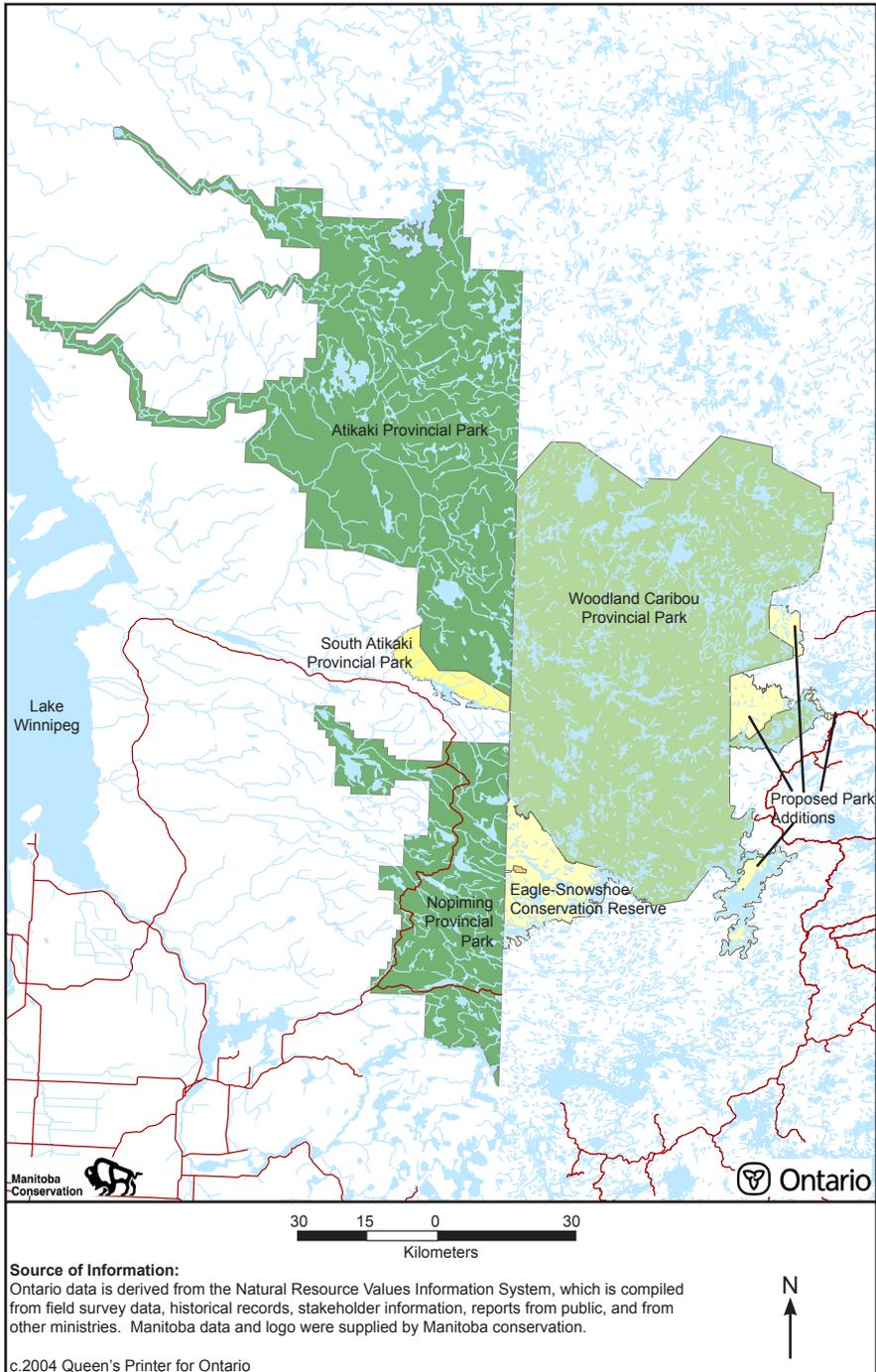
Other protected area initiatives by First Nations in this region may partner with the Interprovincial Wilderness Area in the future. This would further strengthen the possibilities. Both provinces are open to new partnership models.

Manitoba Conservation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources foresee many benefits to be obtained from cooperation in the management of the proposed Interprovincial Wilderness Area. Benefits could include better service to visitors, greater efficiency in the delivery of services, improved conservation efforts, and improved relations with First Nations and with stakeholders and interest groups. At this time, identified areas of co-operation include research, resource management (fire/vegetation management, enforcement, wildlife and fisheries), recreation management (manage for high quality recreational opportunities) and marketing (Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River).

Both governments recognize that the proposed wilderness area is linked with traditional territory and use by First Nations in both provinces. Similarly, many stakeholders such as lodges, outfitters, canoeists, eco-tourists, and others, have various interests in the area. Input and partnerships with First Nations and stakeholders would serve to strengthen decision making and management initiatives.

The following sections sketch out potential benefits that could be realized through the proposed wilderness area.

Figure 1. Proposed Interprovincial Wilderness Area (2003)



Research

Cooperative management of the proposed interprovincial wilderness area would help to realize some of the research potential of the area. The proposed interprovincial wilderness area offers a large pristine wilderness of diverse and impressive flora, fauna, waterways and cultural heritage. This setting could provide a control area for studies wishing to look at how the natural world functions over a landscape unaltered by industrial development.

On-going research is currently being conducted on woodland caribou in both provinces. Inter-jurisdictional research on this nationally threatened species is seen as a key benefit of cooperation in the proposed area. Groups of woodland caribou regularly migrate, unhindered, across this landscape. Opportunities for research beyond provincial borders would be beneficial towards better understanding and protection of this species.

Future research would complement existing initiatives such as Ontario's Woodland Caribou Recovery Strategy and Manitoba's Woodland Caribou Management & Research Strategy.

Research is also being conducted through user surveys of canoeists in both provinces. Blending these efforts would be beneficial, especially in cases where there are shared watercourses.

Research on lake sturgeon has been conducted on the Bloodvein and Pigeon Rivers. The Taiga Biological Station, located in the South Atikaki Park Reserve, is a research field station of the Department of Zoology, University of Manitoba, dedicated to the study of the ecology of the northern boreal forest. Opportunities for cooperative research with outside agencies such as this and with other government departments in both provinces would be further explored.

Resource Management

Cooperating on resource management would be a key benefit of the Interprovincial Wilderness Area. It is recognized that the wildlife of these protected areas know no provincial boundaries, and need to be considered in the context of their entire range.

The opportunity to enhance cooperative fire management regimes in the two provinces is seen as a benefit of this interprovincial partnership. Personnel from each province could more easily communicate with their counterparts on fire management and movement. Each province has different levels of suppression priority where burning is allowed to sustain ecosystems or where fire is fought to protect infrastructure and values. A working understanding of each province's fire suppression practices would also be beneficial in managing habitat requirements for species such as woodland caribou.

A boundary waters agreement currently exists whereby each province's natural resources/conservation officers cooperate on fishing regulations on

specific border lakes. This agreement could be extended to other water bodies and the possibility of transboundary privileges and joint patrols could be further pursued.

Marketing

Realization of an interprovincial wilderness area would help to raise the profile of this environmentally vital boreal region of Canada and its recreational potential. Shared marketing would further the potential for growth in eco-tourism and adventure tourism. Increased economic opportunities associated with heightened interest and visitation in the region would likely occur. New economic opportunities could be managed to directly and indirectly benefit surrounding communities. Joint marketing initiatives tied to establishment of the new interprovincial wilderness area could be considered and, where appropriate, pursued.

Management of Recreational Opportunities

The interprovincial area boasts active and successful fly-in lodge and outfitting operations that bring thousands of visitors to the area each year to pursue outdoor activities. Thousands more come into the region on their own for wilderness canoeing experiences, frequently traveling between the provinces on connecting waterways. Visitors to the region share a common interest in seeking a pristine wilderness environment and an escape from the rigors of their modern lives.

The area is seen as having enormous potential for growth in adventure travel, eco-tourism and eco-cultural tourism. As environmental protection is paramount, great effort must be made through planning initiatives to anticipate growth in protected area use and to manage accordingly.

To ensure visitor expectations of a wilderness experience are met, the possibility of providing compatible management direction in both provinces should be examined. Canoe route designation and maintenance, examination of visitor capacities and quotas, registration fees, no-trace camping regulations and standardized information and mapping are areas that would be explored through a coordinated and consistent interprovincial approach.

Current Management Status and Next Steps

Introduction of the interprovincial initiative occurred at the Canadian Parks Council annual meeting in February 2003. Manitoba and Ontario committed to commence consultation on the initiative through their respective planning processes in Atikaki and Woodland Caribou Provincial Parks. These consultations have been gauging support for the interprovincial concept and will determine which of the park lands and protected areas should be included in the proposed interprovincial wilderness area.

In Manitoba, the Atikaki Provincial Park and Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River Management Plan is currently in its final phase of approvals. Nopiming

Provincial Park is operating under Interim Management Guidelines (1988) and South Atikaki Provincial Park has recently been regulated. In Ontario, the Woodland Caribou Signature Site Strategy is entering its preliminary stage where presentation of the preliminary park management plan for Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and the recommended park additions and the draft resource management plan for the Eagle Snowshoe Conservation Reserve will be released soon.

Boreal wilderness areas of rugged shield and wild rivers are perhaps Canada's greatest and most identifiable natural heritage. Enhanced protection and management of a large pristine wilderness area would provide a living legacy to Canadians and an example to the world of this country's commitment to conservation.

Pimachiowin Aki Proposed World Heritage Site

The second example involves crossing jurisdictional as well as cultural borders. The Pimachiowin Aki proposed World Heritage Site is a partnership between the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario and the Accord First Nations of Pikangikum, Poplar River, Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids and Bloodvein River. This site has been recognized as internationally significant by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) because of the planned integration of traditional and western ecological knowledge for land management and protection (IUCN 2004).

Translated, Pimachiowin Aki means *the land that sustains us* or *the land that gives us life*. The area will be protected as an Anishinabe cultural landscape. This designation will ensure that the Anishinabe who live there will benefit from sustainable economic activities that support their survival as a people, increase their well-being and maintain the ecological health of the land. It will also benefit Manitoba and northwestern Ontario because it will generate jobs, tourism and suitable developments that will help all Canadians enjoy this area (Alex Peters, Pikangikum, pers. comm.).

In 2002, Pikangikum, Poplar River, Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids and Bloodvein River First Nations signed the Protected Areas and First Nation Stewardship Accord which committed them to a cooperative effort to protect and manage their traditional lands according to Anishinabe values and land management practices and to seek designation for a series of linked protected areas within their traditional territories as a World Heritage Site. The outstanding value of the area has also been recognized by the governments of Manitoba and Ontario through the creation of two large wilderness parks that straddle the provincial border in the same region – Atikaki Provincial Park in Manitoba and Woodland Caribou Provincial Park in Ontario.

In December 2002 the two provinces and the five Accord First Nations submitted a joint proposal to Parks Canada for inclusion on Canada's tentative list – a list of ten sites that Canada would put forward to UNESCO for World

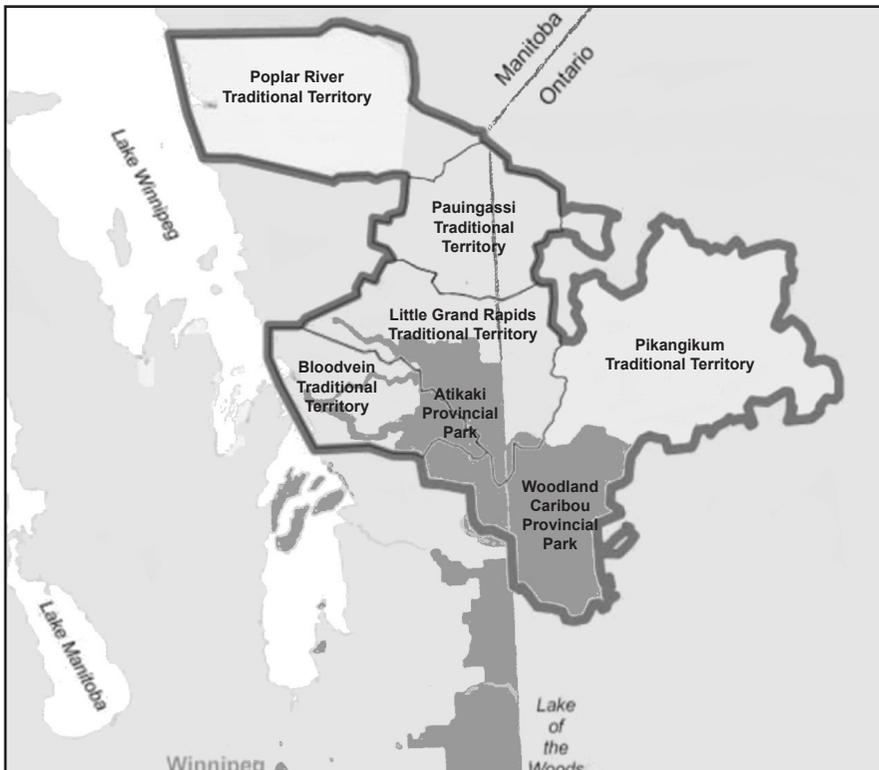
Heritage Site designation over the next decade (Parks Canada 2004). This proposal was one of 125 proposals that Parks Canada had received from provincial and territorial governments.

The area of interest is about 43,000 square kilometres (Figure 2). What is particularly notable is the combination of natural and cultural values that the proposed site will be nominated for. The site represents an outstanding example of traditional lifeways by Aboriginal people and exemplifies a land use that is representative of a culture and human interaction with the environment. It has exceptional natural and scenic values, with wild rivers and extensive undisturbed forests, lakes and wetlands. The region represents critical habitat for several threatened or endangered species including woodland caribou, bald eagles, and wolverines.

The final boundaries of the proposed World Heritage Site will be one of the outcomes of community-based land use planning and public consultations.

The project has already generated considerable international interest as it will fill an identified gap in the World Heritage Site system of protected areas. At the Boreal Zone Workshop in St. Petersburg, Russia in October 2003 the

Figure 2. World Heritage Site Planning Area



IUCN stated:

This site is remarkable because of the existence of diverse and significant boreal forest values including woodland caribou and migratory bird populations in an ecologically intact cultural landscape and extensive intact boreal land and water ecosystem with system of lakes, rivers and wetlands. It fills an important gap by representing the Canadian boreal shield ecozone. This site is also internationally significant because of the planned integration of traditional and western ecological knowledge for land management and protection. The agreement between the First Nations in whose traditional territory this site is located is precedent setting (IUCN 2004:6).

The Partnership

To advance the nomination, the five Accord First Nations and the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario have formed a partnership known as the World Heritage Site Assembly. The partnership acknowledges that although ownership of the land will not change, each jurisdiction will be responsible for planning and management in its area and that aboriginal and treaty rights will remain fully protected.

Since its inception in late 2004, the Assembly has met four times and has established a number of working groups and committees to assist in preparing the nomination. Preparations for the nomination are expected to take five years to complete. This will include significant community-based land use planning to identify and document significant elements of the site (such as sacred sites or archaeological sites of special significance), determine appropriate land uses for different areas, finalize the site boundaries, develop and implement comprehensive land management plans, conduct an international comparative analysis and engage in public participation processes. A name for the site is pending. A challenge that has developed into a benefit has been the hurdle of language – initially perceived as something that would require patience on both sides, which has resulted in the development of increased cross cultural awareness.

Innovation and Opportunity Partnership: Ontario Parks and Pikangikum First Nation

The Innovation and Opportunity partnership between Ontario Parks and Pikangikum First Nation is focused primarily on research, interpretation and education opportunities in the Pikangikum Area of Interest within Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. This agreement has resulted in the birth of a closer and more effective working relationship between the two partners and is another example of cross-cultural, cross-jurisdictional partnership.

Woodland Caribou Provincial Park is located in the heart of Canada's Precambrian Shield. It adjoins the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area where

Pikangikum First Nation people are engaging in community-based land use planning to establish new livelihood opportunities, including those related to protected areas that will be established within the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area (Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation 2003). The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is developing a Park Management Plan for Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. A component of the plan will explore opportunities and enable mechanisms to address First Nations interests within Woodland Caribou Provincial Park.

Northern Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (Pikangikum Area of Interest) and the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area encompass an expansive, mostly un-roaded mosaic in the central boreal highlands. The range of biophysical features on this landscape includes extensive river networks and lakes as well as vast forests, muskeg wetlands and fens. The scale of the landscape offers the potential for world-class protected area learning and tourism opportunities that feature the culture, history and Indigenous Knowledge tradition of Pikangikum First Nation people. The region lies in the sub-arctic headlands of the Hudson's Bay watershed.

The northern region of Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (Pikangikum Area of Interest) together with the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area, constitute lands that have been occupied by Pikangikum people since "time immemorial". Pikangikum people still have traplines that extend into Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. Some of the other non-native traplines in the park are lands where at one time Pikangikum people trapped and hunted.

Northern Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (Pikangikum Area of Interest), together with the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area, constitutes an indigenous cultural landscape: a "geographical area that has been modified, influenced, or given special cultural meaning by people" (Parks Canada 1994: 119). The indigenous heritage resources within this landscape, and especially within northern Woodland Caribou Park, are expansive. They represent a vital aspect of the prehistoric, historic and contemporary cultural legacy of Pikangikum First Nation people and their ancestors in the boreal forest and Canadian Shield. The high density of undisturbed archaeological and cultural sites confirms a high level of occupancy by Aboriginal people who have continued to occupy the area for the last 6,000 years. Of particular significance are the numerous high-quality rock art (pictograph) sites. Of additional particular interest are ecologically rich sites such as planted Manomin fields within the landscape. These complement the other heritage resources found there. The Bloodvein and Berens Rivers served as important fur trade routes. Remnant trading post sites still exist in the area.

Much of Woodland Caribou Park and the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area represent what the United Nations calls the "combined works of nature and man".

Not only do the pictographs on the Bloodvein River come from the culture of Pikangikum people but members from the First Nation are buried in the northern reaches of the park and the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area. They made the channels (*dawaapakinigh*) that allow passage through many locations on rivers and creeks without the necessity of portaging. They made the fish trap sites (*pinjiiboonaagan*) along rivers and streams that allowed them to keep their fish very “fresh” – alive – all through the winter. They have planted Manomin (wild rice) in lakes throughout the landscape, including within Woodland Caribou Park, right up to the 1970’s, when they planted Prairie Lake.

Woodland Caribou Provincial Park has been declared a “Signature Site” through Ontario’s Living Legacy – Land Use Strategy. Signature Sites have a special significance within Ontario’s Living Legacy protected areas initiative. Including contemporary First Nation’s people will enhance this vision. To this day, one thing has remained: an indigenous presence of Pikangikum people on the landscape now called Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. A rich potential exists to develop Woodland Caribou Provincial Park as a “world class” landscape through the full partnership of First Nation communities.

This Agreement represents the initiation of a mutually enriching partnership agreement between Pikangikum First Nation and Ontario Parks. It incorporates a vision of renewal, collaboration, partnerships, consensus-based decision-making, respect for people from different cultures and respect for the land. The core of this vision is mutually enriching dialogue and learning between cultures. This dialogue and learning will celebrate the richness and vitality of the Indigenous Knowledge tradition of Pikangikum First Nation. It will be expressed in the form of collaboration and partnership to facilitate the interpretation of the indigenous cultural heritage of Pikangikum people in the area.

Pikangikum people would like to participate in developing the potential of Woodland Caribou Provincial Park by focusing on their aboriginal pre-historic, historic and contemporary culture within their traditional territories. Theirs is a culture that reaches backwards in unbroken continuity to a rich aboriginal history and forward to their future as a First Nation community.

The shared vision of Pikangikum and Ontario Parks is one of partnership to ensure the protection of this landscape. This partnership will be in keeping with the core values and principles of the culture and way of life of Pikangikum people on the land working harmoniously with the responsibilities of Ontario with respect to the land base. This partnership will dramatically enrich the experience of visitors and others wanting to learn about the landscape.

Summary

Partnership and relationship are two words that are used frequently in today’s cooperative language. But in order for these words to have true value, another

word lurks in the background and is the cornerstone of any partnership or relationship. That word is respect. Whether the relationship or partnership you are building is with a First Nation government, a First Nation Community, an elder or a Provincial government, respect for those partners past, present and future is integral for the partnership to succeed.

Ontario Parks and Woodland Caribou Provincial Park specifically are involved in three very exciting partnerships where relationships are being carefully built to stand the test of time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all of the partners mentioned in the above illustrations; Pikangikum First Nation, Bloodvein River First Nation, Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Pauingassi First Nation, Poplar River First Nation and Manitoba Conservation, Province of Manitoba for their part in the aforementioned initiatives. I would also like to pay specific attention to the Elders of each First Nation community for their interest in teaching, sharing and learning while these initiatives move along and the partnerships and relationships develop. Specifically to the Elders of Pikangikum whom, as a result of simple geography, I have the most regular contact with, I am very thankful for their hospitality, patience and understanding as we move forward towards our common objective.

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