



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

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from the neighborhood canvassing where they found about 73 percent of the people they polled were against losing Northside Park to a shopping center (15 percent for, 12 percent undecided). They will also discuss strategy and fundraising for a grass-roots effort like this.

You may need this information because, within our current system, this could happen again.

Save Our Parks believes that Gainesville's parks belong to its citizens and should not be sold or swapped for private development without our consent. Northside Park has been defended twice before and, without greater protection, may be threatened again in the near future.

One possible plan would be to petition for a charter amendment to protect parks or

Our Parks Are In Jeopardy

BY KRISTINA JACKSON

Newsletter Editor

On August 22, about 200 local residents protested on the steps of Gainesville City Hall to say, "Our parks are not for sale!"

The commission's chambers were packed in the effort to prevent the paving of a public park for another shopping mall. This citizen participation no doubt made the difference in a narrow 4-to-3 win.

By this one vote margin, the commissioners protected Northside Park from being bulldozed by Wal-Mart to build a supercenter. It was said that several other big box corporations similarly had their eye on Northside Park.

Luckily, a majority of commissioners agreed that this park land is not for sale. Special thanks go to Commissioner Craig

Lowe who made the motion and to Commissioner Jack Donovan for his second, as well as his frank critique of Wal-Mart's business practices.

At our December 1st general meeting, Lauren McDonell and Rob Brinkman will discuss how they organized in the neighborhoods surrounding Northside Park creating coalitions that would become Save Our Parks.

Save Our Parks waged a multi-faceted campaign to block the sale of this land for private development. They researched the issues and surveyed over 300 area neighbors. They distributed information, stickers and signs. They lobbied commissioners. Then, they rallied supporters to participate by calling, writing and, perhaps most importantly, showing up at City Hall.

Rob and Lauren will present the results

see PARKS, page 3

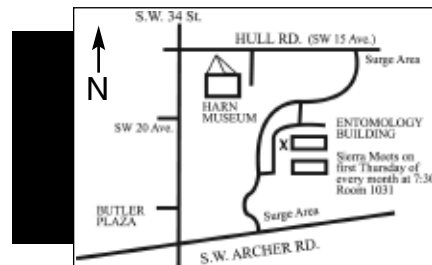
GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, Dec. 1st, 7:30 PM

Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus
(Just east of the Performing Arts Center. Turn south off
Hull Road on to Natural Areas Road.)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, 101

LAUREN MCDONELL AND ROB BRINKMAN, SAVE OUR PARKS



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Mercury Contamination In Your Backyard

BY LINDA POLLINI

The single, largest source of mercury pollution in the United States is from coal-burning power plants.

Mercury is released into the atmosphere, returns to earth via rain and ends up in our lakes and streams where it accumulates in the fish.

Mercury is a persistent, bio-accumulative nerve toxin and even in very small doses, can cause neurological and developmental damage to unborn babies and young children.

In most cases, mercury attacks the brain and nervous system. Mercury makes you stupid.

Maybe our governmental representatives have been eating too many contaminated fish because they are considering increasing mercury in our air.

Additional coal-burning power plants are being planned all around Florida: Gainesville, Jacksonville, Palatka and Perry.

Cement kilns, like Florida Rock and Anderson Columbia (at Itchetucknee Springs) add more mercury into the equation. When Florida hands out permits to operate, allowing 80 lbs of mercury (per facility) into the air every year, it adds up to a major impact on our lifestyle.

The state says they don't know where the mercury in the fish is coming from. Apparently they did not read their own Florida DEP report (2003) that showed reducing mercury emissions reduced the amount of mercury present in fish.

At a recent Newberry City Commission meeting — where the planning and zoning board approved doubling the capacity of the Florida Rock Cement Plant — their paid Koogler & Associates consultant told me that most of the mercury wouldn't fall around the plant, but would be taken further away before it eventually fell to earth.

As if that makes it okay! Don't we all live on the same planet and hasn't anyone recognized their responsibility in regards to the global warming problem?

There is an alarming disjunct at all levels of government. They do not admit they are contributing to the problem.

The City of Gainesville must recognize that they are part of the problem and find an alternate solution to a coal-burning power plant.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told the coal industry in 2001 that 90% reductions would be required, based

on existing technology. (The presentation can be viewed at: <http://cta.policy.net/epamercury.pdf>) However, under pressure from the Bush Administration, the EPA has now announced that it will only require a 30% reduction by 2010.

They will also allow dirty plants to buy mercury pollution allowances from cleaner plants.

There are at least two things you can do right now:

1) Have your hair tested for mercury content. Especially if you eat a lot of seafood and fish, you may have dangerously high levels of mercury in your system and not know it. To order a testing kit (\$25) and find out more about mercury, go to sierraclub.org/mercury.

2) Go to the EPA website and submit comments (<http://www.epa.gov/mercury>).

EPA has reopened for public comment two recent actions governing how the agency regulates mercury emissions from utilities.

Both of the rules in question were established March of 2005. The Agency is taking this action in response to petitions filed by several states, tribes, industry and envi-

see MERCURY, page 7

CHAIR'S



CORNER

Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

National: <http://www.sierraclub.org> • Local: <http://www.gatorsierra.org>

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FOLDING PARTY

Interested in hosting a newsletter folding party? Contact Scott Camil at 375-2563

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December Outings

KAREN GARREN

Outing Chair

DEC. 17-18, weekend—Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge: Canoe camp with us or just come for the day. We have reserved a camping platform on Canal Run Trail.

Climb the tower for a spectacular view over-looking the swamp. Visit Chesser Island's restored homestead, bike miles of roads for good wildlife viewing or bring your canoe for a day's paddle.

Make canoe camping reservations with Karen Garren at \$10/person.

JAN. 14, Saturday—Outings Committee meeting, join us or send your suggestions ahead of time. Location to be announced.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

JANUARY 2006, San Felasco

Hammock State Preserve—backpack camping.

FEBRUARY 2006, Crystal River National National Wildlife Refuge—canoeing to view manatee.



All Sierra Club outings are educational and open to the public. Some outings have fees and we will gladly accept donations. Thank you, hope to see you out in the

woods! Contact Karen at 352-371-0008, or at IluvFla@bellsouth.net.

PARKS, from page 1

recreation lands owned by the City of Gainesville. This will allow the citizens of Gainesville to decide who should control the fate of public parks.

If passed, the amendment would provide greater protection to parks. If in a similar scenario, the city decided to approve the sale of parkland for development, it would then be put to a vote in a citywide referendum. The people would decide whether or not the park should be sold or traded.

The City of Gainesville Charter currently provides for such a referendum before the Commission could sell GRU; don't our parks deserve as much protection?

The Commission recently refused to consider placing a charter amendment on the ballot; however, Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan suggested that the city could put in place conservation easements and convey

those to third party private non-profit conservation organizations as a means of permanently protecting these lands.

Gainesville owns significant amounts of recreation and conservation property; currently the protection of those lands depends on the political will of whoever might be on the Commission. Commissioner Chestnut suggested a resolution setting city policy that parks are not for sale.

While this is a weak level of protection, at least it would notify the development community that selling or trading parks is contrary to city policy.

As more of our urban areas are in-filled, pressure on local governments to sell or trade recreation and conservation lands will only increase.

However as population grows, the need for adequate parkland grows. There is a coming conflict and we must be prepared to save our parks.

Only 16 years ago the County trans-

ferred Northside Park to Gainesville and assured those people who had rallied to save it that this park was protected in perpetuity. As we saw this year, forever is negotiable when a wealthy developer is in the picture.

About the speakers

Lauren McDonell is the project coordinator of the Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information at UF. She and her husband Matt bought their first home just a couple of hundred yards from Northside Park, she frequently bicycles to work on campus.

Rob Brinkman is a volunteer activist and a member of the SSJ Sierra executive committee. He serves on several community advisory boards including Gainesville Energy Advisory Committee. He is presently chair of the Alachua County Environmental Protection Advisory Committee.



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Managing Florida's Rural Suwannee River

BY ANNETTE LONG

For almost ten years now, the Suwannee River Water Management District has been working on portions of the Lower Suwannee River Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs). The deadline for the establishment of these minimum flows (MFL's) is fast approaching.

In 1996, the Florida Legislature mandated that all surface waters in the State of Florida be assigned a MFL below which there will be "significant harm" to the natural environment.

Using significant harm as a state standard is particularly disturbing. Significant harm has been explained to me as damage to habitat that takes around 40 years to recover. It is possible that District officials can actually set a higher level of protection by using more stringent standards in their permitting rules.

It is critical that the District gets these MFL's right. The Suwannee River is one of the least developed river systems in Florida. At least 18 miles of the river banks in the Lower Suwannee are wild lands held in a

series of National Wildlife Refuges and Management Areas. The Lower Suwannee is home to at least four endangered species, and the protected Gulf Sturgeon.

The MFL draft document for the Lower Suwannee River and Estuary includes Manatee and Fanning Springs and is over 400 complex pages. Save Our Suwannee, Inc., a local advocacy group for the river, hired an expert to examine the MFL document due to its technical detail.

The District is planning to set a seasonal flow regime for both the Lower Suwannee River and the springs. Following the historical river records, they are proposing a winter MFL that is slightly higher than the summer MFL. Submerged aquatic vegetation was chosen as the limiting biological habitat that would be damaged if the Lower Suwannee River flow goes below the MFL proposed.

Winter manatee warm water refuge was used as the highest and best habitat to protect for the springs. The three springs — Manatee, Fanning and Little Fanning — have MFLs that are intended to maintain

90% of the historic flow. At Fanning Spring, a physical passage for manatees should be maintained by establishing a minimum level of 2.71 feet (NGVD) in the spring run for the period of November – April.

After the draft report was issued, the Suwannee River Water Management District hired an august group of professionals to peer review the document to assure the public that the methods used to establish the minimum flow is scientifically sound. One of these experts referred to the Lower Suwannee River as a "rare jewel" due to its undeveloped condition and biodiversity.

The report from the Peer Review Panel had several concerns regarding the springs MFL's that I do not believe have been addressed by District staff. There group complained of many "data quality and quantity problems" which resulted in statistical models with "manufactured" data. For instance, the Manatee Spring MFL model uses the flow/stage in the River and the flow at Fanning Spring rather than using the data that has been gathered at Manatee Spring by the U.S. Geological Survey to calculate the proper minimum flow.

The next District meeting to discuss the progress of MFL establishment will be held on December 13th. The final hearing for adoption is planned for April 2006.

Another Mine Shot Down in Levy County

BY ANNETTE LONG

Secretary SSJ and President Save our Suwannee

A mine at Manatee Springs State Park?

Anyone can tell you an open pit strip mine does not belong under a mile from a state park—especially a park with a first-magnitude spring and extensive cave system. Yet Limerock Industries, Inc. tried it.

In April 2001, this Chiefland, Florida based company applied to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to open a 160-acre pit about 5 miles out-

side of Chiefland. In July, they applied to Levy County for the Mining and Excavation Permit. This process requires public notification and we all found out about the plan to put a mine next door to the park, the Suwannee River and Manatee Springs Cave.

As it turns out, the proposed mine site includes a large karst feature that dumps water directly into the belowground spring/cave system. The company had already excavated a small pit in the center of an enormous dairy feedlot. Water samples from this pit showed almost 4 times the level of nitrates of the rest of the cave's water system.

The LII application was withdrawn the day before it was to be heard before the Levy County Planning Commission. This permit should never have been applied for because two years ago, Levy County devel-

oped new Land Development Regulations for mining. An unusual but positive thing about the Levy County regulations is that they prohibit mining in several county areas.

Most important to this forum is the prohibition "Within two miles of the Manatee Springs or Fanning Springs State Park boundaries". There is also language that creates a mile-wide corridor around streams or fractures with the potential to impact Manatee Springs or Fanning Springs.

These regulations specifically protect water quality and quantity for private or public water supply wells, and the flow of Manatee or Fanning Springs.

As mentioned in a previous issue of this newsletter, White Construction had

see MINE, next page

Cross Purposes

UPDATE ON OCKLAWAHA RIVER WATER SUPPLY SHENANIGANS

BY KAREN AHLERS

Ocklawaha River Restoration Coordinator
Florida Defenders of the Environment

As mentioned in last month's Chair's Corner, the St. Johns Water Management District recently held a public meeting to assess interest in using the lower Ocklawaha River (LOR) including Rodman Reservoir as a water supply source. At least half the participants at this meeting were from local and regional conservation groups.

A request from the Putnam County Commission launched the District's investigation. Putnam County specifically requested a study of the potential of Rodman Reservoir after they received a letter from Rep. Pickens and Sen. Rod Smith urging them to do so. Twenty year projections show that Putnam County does not need the water.

The District's proposed plan would produce 20-30 million gallons per day (mg/d) to be transported more than 100

miles to Flagler and Volusia counties. Needless to say, transportation costs are more than double the cost of processing. Based on preliminary studies from the mid-90's, the LOR could reliably produce 100 mg/d. A high level District official has said that substantially more water can be taken



from the LOR with the Rodman Dam in place, contradicting the state and federal positions for removal of the structure.

Draining the heart of Florida of fresh water and transporting it more than 100

miles is an outrageous solution to out-of-control growth in coastal and central Florida. Inaccurate modeling done by the Southwest Florida Water Management District a few years ago resulted in Pasco County being sucked dry by Hillsborough County. Can the SJRWMD's models be trusted to protect the Ocklawaha?

Clearly, if projected growth occurs, water shortages will occur in coastal and central Florida areas. Counties need to implement water concurrency in planning for future growth based on what their own resources allow rather than looking to cross county and inter-basin transfers. The State Comprehensive Plan establishes the protection and use of natural water systems in lieu of structural alternatives.

We need to let Gov. Bush and Sec. Castille know that some in the District are working at cross-purposes to their goal of restoring the Ocklawaha River. Urge them to push the District to design a plan and issue permits to breach Rodman Dam and restore the river.

Perhaps in the future a study of the river's potential as a water supply source will be deemed necessary for more local needs but for now, the priority should be restoring the Ocklawaha.

MINE, from previous page

submitted an application to mine adjacent to Manatee Springs State Park in July 2004. Levy County denied the permit as it

did not comply with the local mining ordinance.

White Construction filed a lawsuit to appeal the County's decision. In late October of this year, the case was dis-

missed.

Thanks to the county's pro-active regulation and active citizen input, it looks like Manatee Spring will remain mine-free.

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New Tree Ordinance Overly Pruned

BY ROB BRINKMAN

SSJ Sierra Group Government Liaison

Land Development Regulations are truly "where the rubber hits the road". These LDRs determine how a county implements their comprehensive plan for the next decade.

The Alachua County Commission is about to adopt new LDRs on issues of utmost importance to the Sierra Club. We have invested much time and effort in the new LDRs on Natural & Historic Resource Protection, including the draft tree ordinance. It is vital that all Sierrans make the commission aware of your desire for strong unambiguous regulations.

by Commissioners informally (without a vote) suggesting that staff make accommodating changes. These are mostly daytime meetings when concerned citizens are at work, those attending may be working too; they are paid to be there to represent their employer's interests. This distorts the process and results in weaker regulations.

Among the good provisions of the tree ordinance that have been removed is the tree replacement table which specified for any tree of a given size how many trees were required to replace it. Now mitigation for removal of existing trees is only required for heritage trees, 20 inches or larger in diameter. Previously all trees eight inches or more in diameter were regulated, and replacement or mitigation was required.

Currently all trees are classified as heritage when they are at least 30 inches in diameter, staff has represented that the new 20 inch standard for most species is a significant strengthening of the ordinance, but at the same time trees under 20 inches have lost all protection!

The proposed tree ordinance only requires retention of 20% of existing tree canopy and a landscape plan that will result in 30% canopy coverage of the site in 20 years. At least one

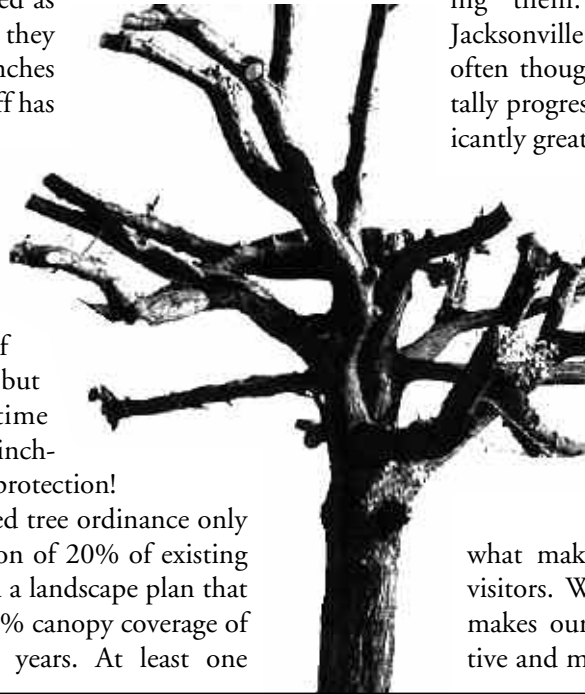
Commissioner, Mike Byerly, has been pushing for a 50% canopy coverage requirement in 20 years. Developers have complained that this will be impossible in some instances. The commissioner challenged them to produce one example of a site where this would not be possible, to date there has been no response.

Trees provide many services to the biosphere free-of-charge. They absorb carbon dioxide and generate oxygen. Trees filter dust, protect us from damaging winds and reduce noise. Trees reduce erosion and provide wildlife habitat. They moderate temperatures, helping to reduce energy consumption, and provide aesthetic scenic enhancement. Trees are one of this area's greatest economic assets. They deserve far

more protection than we are giving them. While cities like Jacksonville and Atlanta are not often thought of as environmentally progressive, they have significantly greater tree protection and canopy requirements.

Those that have sought to weaken the proposed tree ordinance are in fact reducing this areas and their own economic viability. This area's wonderful tree canopy is

what makes it so attractive to visitors. We must protect what makes our area unique, attractive and more valuable.



DECEMBER 8, THURSDAY

ALACHUA COUNTY FINAL HEARING ON NATURAL & HISTORIC RESOURCE PROTECTION DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Our draft tree ordinance has been drastically watered-down. Typically, regulations start out as what county staff feels is the best implementation of the comprehensive plan. Workshops are held with stakeholders — which ideally would be people such as you, in actuality it is mostly representatives of business interests affected by the LDR's. They express their concerns and staff often makes changes. Then, the commission holds public hearings where people, frequently lawyers for large landowners and other business interests, ask for specific changes. These requests are often obliged

Fishermen Come Out Against Coal-Power Plant

BY KRISTINA JACKSON

Newsletter Editor

Citing state and federal health advisories on the dangers of eating Florida fish, the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club recently requested the Gainesville City Commission avoid coal in their expansion of Gainesville Regional Utilities.

The GOFC, a non-profit organization

with a membership of over 140 families, sent a detailed letter to the commission. This letter addresses the current deliberations on a new power plant and advocates for conservation, cleaner fuels and alternative energy sources.

GOFC says that if coal is selected the mercury emissions should be minimized with best available technology. They go on

to suggest that our present power production be measured for mercury and mitigated before proceeding with any power plant expansion.

GOFC President Tommy Thompson writes, "In addition to damaging people's health, we also risk destroying the multi-billion dollar recreational and commercial fisheries in Florida."

SSJ Sierra Club applauds this action of the GOFC and their recognition that we all live downstream.

Mercury Warning

FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORIES WITHIN OUR SSJ SIERRA CLUB 14 COUNTY AREA

BY LINDA POLLINI, CHAIR

Florida Department of Health has established these warnings for children and women of childbearing age. **DO NOT EAT** Largemouth Bass, Bowfin or Gar from the following locations:

- Baker County; St. Mary's River & Ocean Pond
 - Bradford County: Lake Hampton & Lake Sampson
 - Dixie County: Steinhatchee River
 - Hamilton County: Lake Octahatchee
 - Lafayette County: Steinhatchee River
 - Levy County; Waccasassa River
 - Marion County; Smith Lake, Lake Norris, Grasshopper Lake, Half Moon Lake, Lake Delancy & Milldam Lake
 - Putnam County; Lake George
- All other people should eat no more

than 1 fish a month from the above locations except for Grasshopper Lake where no one should eat the three listed fish.

Maximum suggested limit for Largemouth Bass, Bowfin or Gar for women of childbearing age and children is just 1 fish a month. All other people should eat no more than one fish a week because of mercury contamination from the following locations:

- Suwannee River System including the Santa Fe River,



Withlacoochee River and Alapaha River in the following counties: Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Suwannee and Union.

- Alachua County: Newnan's Lake & Lake Santa Fe
- Bradford County: Lake Crosby
- Levy County: Lake Rousseau
- Marion County: Lake Weir, Lake Bryant, Ocklawaha River
- Putnam County: Crescent Lake, Cue Lake, Cowpen Lake, St. John's River north of CR415 to Green Cove Springs

There are restrictions on many other fish (Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, Warmouth, Black Crappie, Redbreast Sunfish, Spotted Sunfish) which are too many to be listed in this newsletter.

For marine fish, do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel or Tilefish because of high levels of mercury.

For additional Fish Advisories go to the website: www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/community/fishconsumptionadvisories/index.html

MERCURY, from page 2

ronmental groups.

The first is the Clean Air Mercury Rule (CAMR) that established the cap-and-trade approach EPA is using to regulate mercury air emissions from utilities.

The second is the rule that altered the Clean Air Act, Section 112, and determined that it was not appropriate or nec-

essary to regulate hazardous air emissions from utilities. Both are flawed and deserve action to more strictly regulate emissions and protect our public health.

The Sierra Club has more information on the rules available online at: www.northstar.sierraclub.org/air/mercury.

THE CITY OF GAINESVILLE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS PART OF THE PROBLEM AND FIND AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION TO A COAL-BURNING POWER PLANT.

Act now, the comment period for both actions will last until December 19, 2005.



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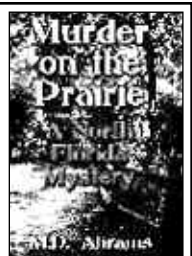
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DECEMBER 2005 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 1, Thursday, 7:30 pm, SSJ General meeting: Community Organizing 101, details on page 1.

December 4, Sunday 1 pm, Elections Committee meets to count ballots for new SSJ Executive Committee. Open to all Sierrans. Call Joan Adams, 378-5129, for directions.

December 8, Thursday, 7 pm, SSJ Executive Committee meeting, Santa Fe Community College, Downtown Gainesville Campus Board Meeting Room.

December 9, Deadline for submissions for the January newsletter.

December 9 – 11, Florida Chapter Sierra Club Conservation Conference at Luther Springs Campground in Hawthorne. Go to www.florida.sierraclub.org for details.

December 16, 7:30 pm SSJ Group Annual Holiday Party at Barbara Reid's, 11 SW 43rd Terrace, Gainesville. Call 372-0046 if you need directions.

December 21, Wednesday, 7 pm, Winter Solstice celebration. Come celebrate the longest night with several hundred of your best friends. For details call Vets For Peace John Hawkins 373-9458.

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The Veterans for Peace Annual Winter Solstice Celebration

Wednesday, Dec. 21

at the Thomas Center, Downtown Gainesville

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