

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**  
**Lake Washington Ship Canal Project Master Plan**  
**EAXX-202-00-G3P-1735821983**  
**King County, Washington**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (USACE) conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended. The Final Environmental Assessment (EA) dated February 2026, for the Lake Washington Ship Canal Project (LWSC) addresses an update to the Project's Master Plan in the City of Seattle, King County, Washington.

The Final EA, incorporated herein by reference, evaluated various alternatives to provide strategic comprehensive management and development of all recreational, natural, and cultural resources throughout the life of the LWSC Project. There is one major Federal action requiring NEPA compliance and analyzed in the EA summarized below.

**a. Proposed Action:** The preferred alternative (Alternative 2) seeks to replace the 1994 Master Plan, outlining changes and updates necessary to improve recreation/visitor use while preserving the historic qualities of the LWSC Project and conserving the natural resources (Section 2.4.3 of the Final EA). The proposed action would address important updates in response to changes in regional demographics, recreation use and demand, amenities within the project, current environmental conditions, and pertinent laws and policies. The proposed action would provide strategic comprehensive management and development of all recreational, natural, and cultural resources throughout the life of the Project. It would also guide planning for efficient and cost-effective management and development for comprehensive use, responsible stewardship, and sustainability.

Under the proposed action (Alternative 2), the updated Master Plan organization is by management area with site-specific resource objectives and recommended development needs. Certain development needs were identified as routine/small scale projects (Table 1). In addition, general resource objectives for the LWSC were revised as follows:

- (1) To establish and maintain close, ongoing coordination with interested federal, state, Tribes, local agencies, and citizen groups and organizations in managing the natural and engineered resources and cultural features associated with the LWSC;
- (2) To protect, preserve, and conserve the LWSC Project's natural and engineered resources to ensure their continued availability for use, enjoyment and recreation by present and future generations;
- (3) To preserve and rehabilitate the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks and LWSC Historic District consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation; and,
- (4) To preserve, enhance and protect habitat on LWSC Project land that is used by fish and wildlife in the LWSC Project area.

The proposed action (Alternative 2) recommends routine verification of boundary surveys and marking of federal property (the last boundary survey and marking of federal property was completed was in 2021); outlines multiple recommendations for improving the Natural Resource Manager's education and outreach program; and recommends producing a LWSC partnership guide to describe the roles of partners and how they work together with USACE. The importance for USACE to sustain beneficial partnerships and foster others within the local community is highlighted.

The proposed action (Alternative 2) recommends the implementation of the Project-wide Vegetation Management Plan, finalized in October 2024, to unite all vegetated areas under a single plan. Land Classifications will be revised to reflect changes to the land classification definitions in 2013 (ER 1130-2-550). With the adoption of the updated Master Plan, land classifications at the Carl S. English Jr. Botanical Garden, South Entryway Buffer Zone and Fish Viewing Area will change; however, how the land is used will not change. The Carl S. English Jr. Botanical Garden and the vegetation located at the South Entryway Buffer Zone will be classified as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. This change in land classification will ensure the Garden is managed not just for vegetative cover but also for public display and scientific study. The Loop Road and lawn areas within the botanical garden will be classified as Multiple Resource Management-Low Density Recreation while the fish viewing gallery and South Entryway Buffer Zone turf area and sidewalks will be classified as High-Density Recreation.

The Final EA evaluates the action of adopting the proposed updated Master Plan. Table 1 lists small-scale proposed actions recommended as development needs under the 2026 Master Plan as part of Alternative 2 (the Selected Alternative). The Final EA sets forth NEPA analysis for proposed Table 1 actions (Section 2.2.2; Appendix A, 2026 Master Plan, Section 8). Proposed Table 1 actions meet the conditions and standards established under the Programmatic Agreement (PA; 2026 Master Plan Attachment D), and a formal Section 106 consultation under National Historic Preservation Act is not required. Future improvements, actions, and development needs described generally in the 2026 Master Plan, but not within the scope of activities included in Table 1, may require further site-specific environmental coordination under applicable laws and regulations prior to implementation.

Table 1. The Final Master Plan (Section 8.5.1) and EA (Section 2.2.) assessed the effects of the following proposed actions at the LWSC organized by management area. These activities also meet the conditions and standards established under the NHPA 106 PA.

<b>LWSC Management Area</b>	<b>Sub-Area and 2026 Master Plan Section</b>	<b>Actions</b> *Actions that require completion of pending LWSC Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Biological Assessment (BA) consultation
<b>Hiram M. Chittenden Locks Site</b>	Locks, Spillway Dam, Piers, Operating Houses (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.1)	Update the public announcement system to better direct boat traffic and pedestrians
	Lock Walls and Spillway Dam Walkway (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.2)	Update and install reader boards to better direct the visitors across the spillway dam
	South Entryway Buffer Zone (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.4)	Install signage to better direct visitors to avoid certain areas to protect them from a 15-foot drop
		Update comfort station to be ADA compliant and more user-friendly
		Install interpretive signs about the breeding heron colony
	South and North Entry Areas and the Formal Promenade (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.5)	Replace wooden stairs in the Cove area
		Install signage regarding calendar of events, and Lock updates at all entrances
		Install exhibits beside the walkways throughout the promenade with historic property elements to the Garden and Historic District
	Operations, Maintenance and Administrative Area (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.6)	Restore Administration Building's pump plant floor, entryway, and rust proof all walls and structures
		Water-seal all concrete buildings
		Repaint all warehouses and buildings
		Restore the woodwork on the door entryway of the Administration Building

<b>LWSC Management Area</b>	<b>Sub-Area and 2026 Master Plan Section</b>	<b>Actions</b> *Actions that require completion of pending LWSC Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Biological Assessment (BA) consultation
		Upgrade the air circulation system in Warehouse No. 1
		Upgrade the technology in the Warehouse No. 1 conference room
		Install interpretive signage about the historic elements and architect posted on the outside of each facility
	Visitor Center and Public Comfort Stations  (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.7)	Upgrade all comfort stations with sensor lighting, automatic doors, sinks with water on sensors, and automatic air dryers to reduce touch points
		Ensure all comfort stations are ADA compliant
		Install baby changing tables in male and female restrooms
	Carl S. English Jr. Garden and the Loop Road (2026 Master Plan Section 5.1.9)	Replace creosote logs with rock or concrete logs along flower beds
		Replace wood archway at west end of gravel path
		Replace and/or repair any damaged concrete with stone pavers
		Replace large trees that were removed near Warehouse No. 2
		Replace the irrigation and water systems and lines through the project
<b>Fremont Cut</b>	2026 Master Plan Section 5.2	Install educational kiosks on noxious and invasive weeds
		Install educational kiosks on the Lombardy Popular Colonnade
<b>Montlake Cut</b>	2026 Master Plan Section 5.3	Level and restore the grass turf areas
		Remove hazard trees*
<b>General/Project Wide</b>	2026 Master Plan Sections 8.1–8.5	Treat concrete surfaces and walkways with safety coating (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Upgrade/Install area lights and security cameras northeast of the Garden and the South Entryway (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)

<b>LWSC Management Area</b>	<b>Sub-Area and 2026 Master Plan Section</b>	<b>Actions</b> *Actions that require completion of pending LWSC Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Biological Assessment (BA) consultation
		Replace damaged fences, and vandalism proof-fences (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Replace and/or repair damaged sidewalks/concrete or paved surfaces throughout the project (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Replace and/or repair roadways, parking lots and yard space (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Repair and replace utility lines and poles in their present configuration and alignments (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Comprehensive rehabilitation of electrical system site-wide
		Maintenance (i.e., mow, weed, fertilize*, apply pesticide*, patch holes, replace underperforming or dead/dying plants) of existing vegetative areas (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Implement the 2024 Project-wide Vegetation Management Plan with an integrated pest management plan for upland application only (2026 Master Plan Section 8.5)
		Change land classifications per (2026 Master Plan Section 8.1, Table 13 of the 2026 Master Plan (Final EA Section 2.2.2, Table 12)
		Routine verification of boundary surveys and marking of Federal property (2026 Master Plan Section 8.2; Final EA Section 2.2.2)
		Implement recommended actions associated with the National Historic District (2026 Master Plan Section 8.3; Final EA Section 2.2.2)
		Improve the Natural Resource Manager's education and outreach program and produce an LWSC partnership guide

LWSC Management Area	Sub-Area and 2026 Master Plan Section	<b>Actions</b> *Actions that require completion of pending LWSC Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Biological Assessment (BA) consultation
		(2026 Master Plan Section 8.4; Final EA Section 2.2.2)

Proposed actions listed in Table 1 will be reviewed prior to implementation to confirm effects are consistent with Final EA analysis and best management practices (BMPs). Future site-specific development, operations and maintenance actions that are not included in Table 1 may undergo further analysis of environmental effects as required by NEPA, as well as other environmental laws/regulations. For instance, while general plans to engage in repairing/replacing revetments along the Fremont and Montlake Cuts and replacing the entire walkway along the Montlake Cut are addressed in this Master Plan/EA, future site-specific work would require further analysis prior to implementation, and may “tier” off the analysis in this Master Plan/EA.

**Alternatives:** In addition to a “no action” plan and the preferred alternative, two other alternatives were identified, but were removed from further consideration. Alternative 3 proposed an updated Master Plan that would maximize natural resource preservation while Alternative 4 proposed an updated Master Plan that would maximize recreation. Alternative 3 would not meet the public demands created by the project itself while sustaining balance with project natural resources, and for this reason was not considered further in the document. Alternative 4 places more emphasis on developing recreational programs over that of providing for natural resources. Further, Alternative 4 would not consider project-wide resource capability and suitability, and would not be consistent with multiple use authorized project purposes, and so was eliminated from further consideration. Alternative 2 (Update Master Plan) is the preferred alternative that was analyzed as USACE’s proposed action because it is derived from authorized Project purposes, USACE policies and regulations on the operation of USACE projects, responses to regional and local needs, resource capabilities and suitable uses, and expressed public interests consistent with authorized Project purposes and pertinent legislation.

For all alternatives, the potential effects of the proposed actions in Table 1 were evaluated, as appropriate. Impacts of these proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions (Table 1) will be minor, short-term, and temporary, and will have minor or no impacts due to BMPs and conservation measures outlined in Section 5 of the EA to avoid or minimize adverse effects. No in-water work is currently proposed for actions in Table 1. Should future proposed projects include in-water work, site-specific analysis will occur prior to implementation. A summary assessment of the potential effects of the proposed action are listed in Table 2:

**Table 2: Summary of Potential Effects of the Proposed Action.**

	Insignificant effects	Insignificant effects as a result of minimization*	Resource unaffected by action
Aesthetics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Air quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aquatic resources/wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invasive species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish and wildlife habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threatened/Endangered species/critical habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historic properties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other cultural resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Floodplains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hazardous, toxic & radioactive waste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hydrology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Land use (Land Classification)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Noise levels	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public infrastructure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socioeconomics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tribal trust resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Water quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recreation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Health and Safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*No compensatory mitigation is proposed. Impact avoidance and minimization is described below.

**Impact Minimization:** All practicable and appropriate means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects were analyzed and incorporated into the proposed action. BMPs as detailed in the EA (Section 5) will be implemented, as appropriate, to minimize adverse impacts. BMPs include methods to reduce dust, to avoid or minimize noise, to reduce soil erosion, and to prevent pollutants from reaching the soil, groundwater, or surface water. Construction, clearing and/or grubbing activities will be scheduled to avoid the migratory bird nesting period (15 April – 31 July) unless otherwise coordinated with resource agencies. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Region 10) Pesticide General Permit BMPs would be implemented during upland pesticide application

**Mitigation:** No compensatory mitigation is proposed for this action as no loss of wetlands, no jeopardy to ESA-listed species, and no substantial reduction to public use of USACE lands are anticipated to occur based on the analyses in the EA. USACE will implement BMPs and conservation measures to ensure impacts are no greater than minimal, short-term effects as described in Section 5 of the Final EA.

**Public Review:** Public review of the draft EA and FONSI was completed on 21 April 2025. All comments submitted during the public review period are responded to in the Final EA and FONSI.

**Treaty Tribes:** The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (MIT) and the Suquamish Tribe were contacted during the public scoping period regarding the proposed action. No comments were received. USACE requested review of the Master Plan on 20 February 2025 and extended the public review period from 24 March to 21 April 2025 at the request of MIT. No comments were received. USACE will continue to coordinate with MIT and the Suquamish Tribe to address each Tribe's interests as part of LWSC's ongoing operation and maintenance.

**Compliance:**

**a. Endangered Species Act:** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are responsible for the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). A Biological Assessment (BA) for the O&M of the LWSC Project was initially transmitted to NMFS and USFWS, collectively known as the Services, in 2001. USACE consulted with USFWS and NMFS on the LWSC Project that resulted in Biological Opinions (BiOps) from USFWS in 2007, and NMFS in 2008. The BiOps included incidental take permits for a period of five years from the issuance dates of the BiOps. On 1 May 2024, USACE submitted a supplemental BA to the Services for their review and to request consultation under the ESA and MSA. USACE has been operating the LWSC in accordance with the 2007 and 2008 BiOps and is continuing to work with the Services while engaged in Section 7 consultation of the ESA.

Regarding the Master Plan, USACE evaluated the effects of the recommended development needs proposed under Alternative 2 to Federal ESA-listed species (Chinook salmon, Steelhead salmon, bull trout, North American green sturgeon, Pacific eulachon and the Southern Resident killer whale). USACE identified two routine/small-scale actions that are a part of Alternative 2 (and included in Table 1) (removal of hazard trees along the Montlake Cut and the use of pesticides and fertilizers) that have the potential to affect ESA-listed species and are included in the ongoing LWSC O&M consultation with NMFS that is still pending as of February 2026. USACE determined all other recommended development needs for this Master Plan update will not affect ESA-listed species. This EA and FONSI will be reevaluated and updated as warranted, once this future ESA consultation is complete.

**b. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA):** USACE determined that most of the proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions would have no effect to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) federally managed fish species in Washington waters will result from the updated Master Plan proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions. USACE identified two routine/small-scale actions that are a part of Alternative 2 (and included in Table 1) (removal of hazard trees along the Montlake Cut and the use of pesticides and fertilizers) that have the potential to affect EFH and are included in the ongoing LWSC O&M consultation with NMFS that is still pending as of February 2026. USACE determined that no effect to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) federally managed fish species in Washington waters will result from the updated Master Plan proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions, pending completion of EFH consultation. USACE will reevaluate and update the EA/FONSI as warranted at the time that the EFH consultation is complete.

**c. Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA):** USACE determined that the proposed project is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved Washington State Coastal Zone Management Program and the CZMA. The proposed project occurs on land owned by the Federal government and is outside the coastal zone (15 CFR 923.33(a)), and activities covered under this EA, and listed in Table 1, will have no direct or indirect effects on coastal land use, water use, or any other coastal zone resource with applicable BMPs. Because this action does not affect uses or resources of the coastal zone no consistency determination is required. A negative determination is not required. In the future, when further site-specific planning is conducted on activities that are generally addressed in the Master Plan, but not included in Table 1 or fully covered under this EA, USACE will address CZMA consistency as warranted.

**d. Clean Water Act:** USACE has determined that the proposed action will not require or trigger compliance with the Clean Water Act (CWA). The project footprint does not contain wetlands but is adjacent to surface waters regulated under CWA Section 404. All proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions, including pesticide applications, are above the ordinary high water mark and removed from the water. Additionally, any spill-over effects from pesticide or herbicide application will be avoided by following all applicable federal and state requirements, including but not limited to WAC 12-228, RCW 15.58, RCW 17.21, Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, and all product labels.

**e. National Historic Preservation Act:** USACE contacted the Washington State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), MIT, Suquamish Indian Tribe, City of Seattle Historic Preservation Program, Friends of the Ballard Locks, and the King County Historic Preservation Program during scoping on 18 May 2021. The SHPO provided comments on 16 September 2021. Scoping comments were not received from the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe or Suquamish Indian Tribe. Other scoping comments are summarized in Appendix A to the EA (2026 Master Plan, Attachment F).

The LWSC is a National Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Any undertaking that may have an effect on the National Historic District as a whole or to any of the contributing and noncontributing elements is to be reviewed by USACE cultural resources staff. In 1994, the Seattle District prepared a Historic Property Management Plan (HPMP) that defined buildings, structures and landscapes as contributing elements to the Historic District (Master Plan Section 2.3.8). The HPMP provides guidance for the management of cultural resources as well as further guidance for the management and care of the Garden and other LWSC lands addressed by the Master Plan. The HPMP contains actions needed to identify, evaluate, and manage historic properties.

A Programmatic Agreement (PA) was developed to cover specific routine undertakings that occur at the LWSC. This means that USACE archaeologists and the Washington SHPO have agreed to an expedited consultation under 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §800, which states that the specific routine actions listed in HPMP Attachment D will not detrimentally affect the Historic District and that these specific actions will not require further consultation. USACE cultural resources staff determine whether the proposed undertaking falls within any of the stipulations in the PA (Master Plan Section 2.3.8, Table 5). If the undertaking does not meet the conditions and standards established under the PA or is a non-routine action, then further formal NHPA Section 106 consultation must occur.

An HPMP update is part of mitigation for the replacement of the original large lock center gate. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between USACE and SHPO that describes this mitigation was signed October 2021 for the “Hiram M. Chittenden Locks Large Lock Center Gate Project” (May 2022; available online at <https://www.nws.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Documents/>). One stipulation is for USACE to update the HPMP with new information on historic buildings and structures found while revising and updating the outdated 1978 National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form. In addition, USACE was required to offer the SHPO, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, at least one opportunity to review and comment on any HPMP revisions. USACE incorporated comments provided by the SHPO via email into the HPMP in October 2022, which fulfills the MOA stipulation.

The Master Plan and HPMP are planning and guidance documents, and only undertakings resulting from the 2026 Master Plan would undergo Section 106 review and SHPO consultation as appropriate. Therefore, the Master Plan and HPMP are in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA.

**Determination:**

**a. Results of the Environmental Analysis:** The probable consequences (impacts and effects) of the proposed action (Alternative 2) on the LWSC Project natural, cultural, and recreational resources were evaluated in the EA. Under Alternative 2, future management changes will improve management programs and process, resulting in beneficial impacts for vegetation, wildlife, water quality, and

aesthetics. Beneficial effects of strategic project planning will result in maximization of project funds. Although major work is not proposed in the future, a number of small-scale actions or developments in upland areas to improve some existing facilities are included under the proposed action (Table 1). The proposed action will enable more efficient land management and better accommodation of the public's recreation needs. Beneficial impacts on recreation will come from modernization and upgrading existing facilities while keeping with the appearance and landscapes that are contributing elements to the Historic District. Impacts of the proposed routine O&M and small-scale actions in Table 1 will be minor, short-term, and temporary, and will have minor or no impacts when using BMPs and conservation measures outlined in Section 5 of the EA. USACE staff will review actions from Table 1 prior to implementation to confirm effects remain consistent with Final EA analysis and best management practices (BMPs). Future site-specific development, operations and maintenance actions that may be proposed following adoption of the updated Master Plan would undergo separate (i.e., tiered) analysis as required by NEPA.

**b. Summary of Impacts and Compliance:** The proposed action will seek to replace the 1994 Master Plan balancing recreation and visitor use with conservation of natural resources. The updated Master Plan will address important updates in response to changes in regional demographics, recreation use and demand, amenities within the project, current environmental conditions, and pertinent laws and policies. The proposed action will provide strategic comprehensive management and development of LWSC Project lands and their associated recreational, natural, and cultural resources. It will also guide planning for efficient and cost-effective management and development for comprehensive use, responsible stewardship, and sustainability. No in-water work or shoreline work with potential effects to coastal resources is proposed without additional project-specific compliance review and so the proposed action complies with the CWA and the CZMA. Apart from two actions identified as having pending ESA and MSA consultation with NMFS, no effects to federally listed species or to their critical habitats will occur as a result of the proposed action, and so the project is in compliance with ESA and MSA. The Master Plan and HPMP are planning and guidance documents, so only undertakings (i.e., projects) resulting from the Master Plan would undergo Section 106 review and SHPO consultation as appropriate. The project complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and USACE has coordinated the work with the Washington SHPO and affected Indian Tribes.

**Finding:** All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, and local government plans were considered in evaluation of alternatives. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, which has incorporated or referenced the best information available; the reviews by other Federal, State and local agencies, Tribes; input of the public; and the review by my staff, it is my determination that the recommended plan would not cause significant adverse effects on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

23 Feb 2026

Date



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