

Tampa Area Naturists, Inc.

Proposal for a Clothing-Optional Beach

Tampa Area Naturists, Inc.

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March 8, 2002

Pinellas County Park Board
Pinellas County Parks Department
631 Chestnut St
Clearwater, FL 33756

Gentlepersons:

We, the members of Tampa Area Naturists, Inc., do respectfully request that this Board designate with appropriate signage a portion of Fort De Soto County Park and/or other county parks on the Gulf of Mexico as a family-oriented, European-style, clothing-optional beach. There is significant acceptance of and participation in clothing-optional recreation in the United States which has long been popular in Europe. Based on attendance and demographic data for the clothing-optional beach at Haulover Park in Miami-Dade County, with which our new County Administrator, Steve Spratt, is familiar, we believe that a similar beach at Fort De Soto County Park would attract 750,000 visitors annually of whom approximately 100,000 would be Pinellas County residents.

We also know that Pinellas residents and visitors from out of the area who seek such clothing-optional facilities would be happy to pay for the privilege. At Haulover Park, which has operated a clothing-optional beach for ten years, parking fees for the clothing-optional section of the beach have generated about \$1.1 million revenue annually over the last several years. We believe that within two years Pinellas County could generate revenues greater than \$1 million from parking or admission fees for a clothing-optional beach.

Based on the acceptance of clothing-optional recreation as illustrated at Haulover Beach, we believe the time has come for Pinellas County to provide it's citizens a designated clothing-optional beach. In addition to the substantial direct revenue the facility can generate, it will also be a significant draw for visitors from around the world thereby generating additional tourist revenues and taxes for Pinellas County and it's local communities. At Haulover Beach in Dade County, 65 percent of beach visitors come from outside the area.

Tampa Area Naturists, Inc. is a Florida not-for-profit corporation with about 65 percent of our members from Pinellas County. We are a diverse group of people covering a wide range of ages including new families with small children to retirees with grown children and grandchildren, married and single, and from all occupations. We are a representative cross-section of Pinellas County who seek to secure and protect the interests of naturists to enjoy clothing-optional recreation on public beaches, parks, and recreational areas and to educate the public about the benefits and enjoyment of clothing-optional recreation.

We wish to work cooperatively with the Pinellas County Park Department much as South Florida Free Beaches has worked successfully with the Miami-Dade County Parks Department in the development, management and daily administration of Haulover Beach. And to that end we offer our suggestions and thoughts in the following materials with regard to the development of a clothing-optional beach site within Fort De Soto County Park.

Sincerely

Jamy Magro
President

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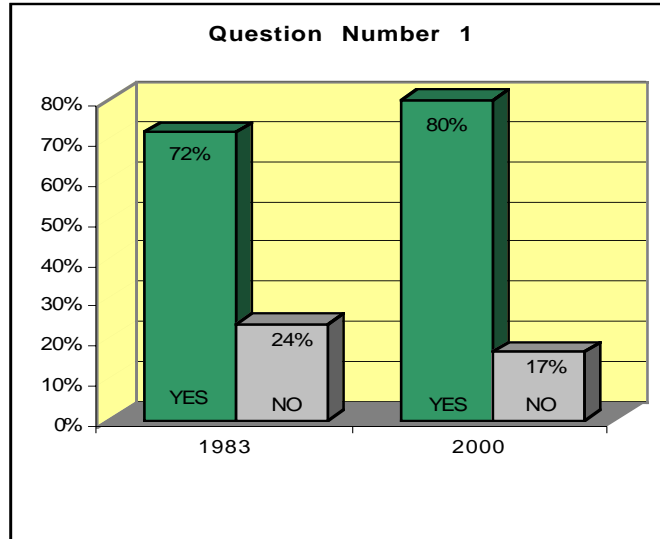
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Why a clothing-optional Beach?

Demand

There is significant, growing demand and acceptance for clothing-optional (CO) recreation in the United States. In 1983, The Naturist Society commissioned an independent Gallup poll of the attitudes of Americans concerning skinny-dipping and nude sunbathing. Those results indicated significant acceptance of the concept of designated clothing-optional beaches. In 2000, The Naturist Education Foundation, the nonprofit educational and informational arm of The Naturist Society, asked the same questions using the well known and highly respected Roper-Starch polling organization to take the pulse of America.

Polls Indicate Strong Support For CO Beaches



The poll results indicate that few Americans object to nude sunbathing in designated areas. In 1983, 72 percent of Americans indicated that they believed that people who enjoy nude sunbathing should be able to do so without interference from officials so long as they do so at a beach that is accepted for that purpose. In 2000, four out of five or 80 percent of Americans, a huge margin of support when compared with the outcome of most political races and ballot initiatives, agreed with this position. Approval for clothing-optional beaches remains

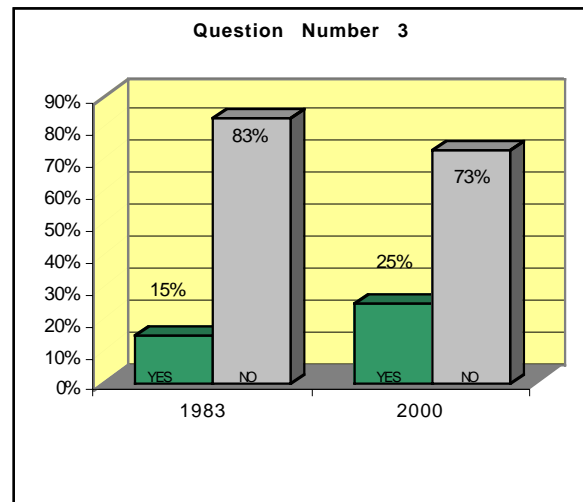
higher for men than for women, but support among women has risen from 65 percent in 1983 to 75 percent in 2000.

A second question noted that local and state governments now set aside public land for types of recreation like snow-mobiling, hunting, and surfing and asked if respondents thought special and secluded areas should be set aside for people who enjoy nude sunbathing. In 2000, 48 percent favored such designation, up from 39 percent in 1983. Clearly acceptance for clothing-optional recreation has become

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mainstream with the number of people approving governmental designation of such sites almost a majority.

In the final question, the percentage of people who had gone skinny-dipping or nude sunbathing in a mixed group of men and women increased from 15 percent in 1983 to 25 percent in 2000. That's one in four Americans. Based on U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, that's 70 million Americans or 230,000 Pinellas residents who have participated in clothing-optional recreation. (See appendix for details.)



Actual Use And Support

Polls and statistical data are interesting, but they are not quite the same as actual usage data. Happily, we have a highly successful clothing-optional beach nearby at Haulover Beach, a Miami-Dade County Park in North Miami Beach which is well known to our new county administrator, Steve Spratt, from his former position in Dade County. Annual attendance at the clothing-optional portion of Haulover Beach is estimated by the Miami-Dade County Parks Department at 1.2 million. Of that number 35 percent or more than 420,000 are estimated to be Dade and Broward County residents and the balance visitors from North America and the rest of the world. Interpolating from the number of visitors to Haulover Beach, it appears that a clothing-optional beach at Fort De Soto could ultimately expect to enjoy about 750,000 visitors annually. Assuming that the 35 percent local usage holds, over 250,000 of these visitors would be from the Tampa Bay Area. Further refining these



Haulover Beach, Miami-Dade County Park

attendance numbers based on U.S. Census Bureau data, it appears that about 100,000 beach-goers would be Pinellas County residents. (Details of these calculations in appendix.)

While the attendance numbers for Haulover Beach are reasonably accurate professional estimates of the Parks Department, they are only estimates. The revenue numbers, however, are hard evidence of the usage and support for this facility.

The clothing-optional beach has generated over \$1 million in parking fees for the last several years.

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User Fees

Fees Accepted

Pinellas County residents and visitors from outside the local area will be happy to pay a parking or user fee for a clothing-optional beach with facilities comparable to a "free" textile-only beach. In Dade County, visitors to the clothing-optional beach at Haulover Park pay a day parking fee of \$4.00 per car to use a parking lot in close proximity to the clothing-optional beach. There are no other admission or user fees. The annual revenue for the past year for day use parking was \$975,000. An additional \$125,000 of revenue was generated from annual parking permit holders for total revenue of \$1.1 million from the clothing-optional beach. The data show that at Haulover Beach with attendance of 1.2 million and revenue of \$1.1 million annually there is a relationship of approximately \$1.00 of revenue per person. We believe that visitors to clothing-optional beaches would be willing to pay \$2 or more per person for the privilege of using the facility.

Implementation

The manner of implementation of a fee for use of a clothing-optional beach is dependant in part on the location of the clothing-optional site; and there is a more comprehensive discussion of these site related factors in our discussion and recommendations of a site. But whether the fee is collected as a parking fee or an admission or user fee, we suggest that it be based as a per person not a per vehicle fee and that it

be set at \$1.00 to \$2.00 per person. Assuming annual attendance of 750,000, this fee would generate revenue of \$750,000 to \$1.5 million. Obviously, the fee structure could admit children with parents free and could waive the fee for residents of the county upon proof of residency as shown on a driver's license.

Assuming annual attendance of 750,000, this fee would generate revenue of \$750,000 to \$1.5 million.

Likewise, the Department might wish to offer an annual pass for frequent users . These are all matters within the Board and the Department's purview. But the point is that there is the potential for significant revenue.

Fee Policy

We realize that the Park Department has generally operated the parks as a free facility for Pinellas County residents paid for from local taxes. While we believe that is an admirable policy, the Department does charge fees for special usage facilities like their campgrounds. We believe that a clothing-optional beach is a facility for which users would expect to pay a special usage fee; and it would be appropriate for the Department to charge a fee for the use of this facility.

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Signage & Demarcation

Boundaries

In our use of Haulover and our observation of the development and management of that park and the role of the “friends of” group, South Florida Free Beaches, we have noted that signage is critical to the management and acceptance of the clothing-optional beach. Simple signs that indicate on one side that a clothing-optional zone is about to be entered and that one may encounter nude sunbathers; and on the other side, that the clothing-optional zone is about to be left and that clothing is required do worlds to minimize user conflict. Once people know that an area enjoys clothing-optional status, they can avoid the area if it offends their sensibilities or, more commonly, they may realize that they are “home.” Likewise, specific demarcation of the area using dune fencing or other natural or man-made boundaries to keep users from wandering out of the designated area is important. In the ten years of its existence, Haulover Beach has had a minimal number of complaints and management problems in large part due to the signage initially provided by South Florida Free Beaches and subsequently by the county.



Informational Signage

In addition to boundary signage, we believe that informational signage spelling out appropriate etiquette for a clothing-optional beach is helpful. While experienced naturists understand the rules and responsibilities that go with the privilege of having a clothing-optional beach, many beach users will have their first clothing-optional experience at this beach; and we will all benefit from the posting of the commonly recognized rules. Such a large sign should indicate indeed that usage of the beach is a privilege that will be revoked if certain minimal standards of conduct are not observed. Typical clothing-optional beach etiquette includes:

- No sexual activity.
- Stay within the designated clothing-optional boundary.
- Ask permission before taking photographs.
- Respect property and privacy of others.
- Be friendly, but don't intrude.
- Cooperate with park rangers and law enforcement personnel.
- Speak up for standards. If a visitor seems unaware of Naturist Etiquette explain it politely and plainly.

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Site Recommendations and Discussion

Fort De Soto - Best County Site

First, after consideration of the various Gulf-front county parks, we concluded that Fort De Soto County Park was the best location for a clothing-optional beach in Pinellas County because it is a large park (900 acres) with significant amounts of open land and beach which are essential to accommodate both the beach users and their vehicles. It also has traditionally been a skinny-dipping beach. It, like Haulover Beach, is also somewhat removed from commercial development and for that reason would avoid potential usage conflicts with commercial land owners and developers. Within the park, we have identified three prospective sites for a designated clothing-optional beach which we call, from southeast to north: East of East Beach; South of North Beach and Northwest of North Beach.

Management Issues

From our observation of Haulover Beach, there are a number of management and administrative issues that need to be considered in the selection of a site as well as the desirability of a site by prospective users. Ease of access and parking rank high on the priority list. Nearly as important, however, are the availability of facilities: sanitary facilities, lifeguards and law enforcement protection/supervision and concessions. Likewise environmental concerns are critical. Finally signage is critical to the creation of reasonable expectations for beach users and to forestall user conflict. Informational signage, as previously discussed, regarding the proper etiquette of clothing-optional beach usage is also extremely important for those new to naturism who may not understand what is considered appropriate behavior. In our review of the three sites, we will address these issues from the perspective of what seems to have worked well at Haulover and which by implication would help make a successful clothing-optional beach at Fort De Soto County Park.

Policing By Beach Ambassadors

While most clothing-optional beach users understand that sexual or lewd behavior is no more appropriate on a clothing-optional beach than on a textile beach, there will be those members of the public who will test the limits of decency. Our experience at Haulover in Dade County and Playalinda and Apollo Beaches in Brevard and Volusia Counties indicates that there are fewer incidents of sexual behavior on the clothing-optional beach



Haulover Beach Ambassadors

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than on the textile beach. This is probably because clothing-optional beach users appreciate the privilege and are self-policing. Indeed at Haulover Beach, South Florida Free Beaches furnishes volunteer beach ambassadors, as Tampa Area Naturists is prepared to do, armed with cell phones who will gently warn over-exuberant users and explain clothing-optional beach etiquette. If the user is non-responsive, the ambassadors will call for assistance from a park ranger or a sheriff. (See Beach Ambassador's Manual in appendix.)

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Access and Parking

Access to this site would at least initially be through the developed East Beach area and could use the existing parking lot although the anticipated number of users for the clothing-optional beach area could create excessive demand for parking. Indeed we envision the parking lot filling on weekends by mid-morning with clothing-optional beach users. When demand for a clothing-optional site proves out and local officials and the public come to understand the benefits of such a use, additional parking and facilities could be added due east of the existing parking lot with footbridges to cross the lagoon. Use of the existing parking facilities has the advantage of low initial capital cost but the disadvantage of user conflict over parking with existing users.

Other Facilities and Services

The other facilities and services which any new beach development would require are restrooms, showers and lifeguard and concession services for food and beverages in reasonable proximity so that beach users can avail themselves of these services without leaving the designated clothing-optional area. During a trial period, portable restrooms can easily be trucked into the back beach and chained to trees. Likewise, lifeguard towers can be installed without significant difficulty; and finally a mobile concession operated either by the Park Department or leased to a concessionaire could be driven to the site daily. There are no significant advantages or disadvantages associated with this site relative to these requirements.

User Conflict

This site appears to have a relatively low user conflict potential. Presumably the primary usage area is presently directly in front of the developed East Beach area. No doubt some textile beach users and walkers use the area east of East Beach for walking and exploring as well as to get away from the higher density usage areas of East Beach. While some of these users may be displaced by the clothing-optional designation, some of them will be comfortable continuing to use the area either



East of East Beach, looking east

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with or without clothing. Because the area is naturally separated from the road by the tidal bay and creek, there is minimal conflict with people from that direction. In addition the natural vegetation screens the area from the road.

Desirability/Aesthetics

From the user perspective, this area is perhaps the least desirable because it is not Gulf front beach. The water along this area is relatively shallow and there are extensive sea grasses and many horseshoe crabs. Since there is minimal wave action, the sand here is not as attractive as the Gulf front beaches that are often in the top ten beaches in the US. These shortcomings make this site less desirable. The beach is, however, backed by a mature stand of Australian Pines which provide some shade. This stand of trees is an aesthetic plus although it may be a user management disadvantage.

Administration and Management

The proximity to an existing developed site would appear to be an advantage since an existing work site could simply be expanded and operated with the same supervisory staff and a limited number of additional staff. The proximity of the wooded area to the clothing-optional beach, however, does offer the potential for some user management issues. We believe fencing, signage and an assertive enforcement policy to keep users out of the wooded area will be important to minimize inappropriate behavior at this site.



East of East Beach, looking west

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South of North Beach Site



Location

South of North Beach is that stretch of beach beginning approximately 0.75 miles north of the Gulf pier and running an additional 0.25 miles north from that approximate beginning point. It is slightly south and seaward of the lagoon that has formed at North Beach which separates North Beach from the Gulf. The beach area is from 0.1 to 0.25 miles from the main road. In between the main road and the beach is an area of open habitat with few trees, hard packed sand/shell and mostly low grasses and succulents which are tolerant of the harsh forebeach habitat zone.

Access and Parking

There is no existing parking (other than roadside parking) available at this site and this lack is an obvious disadvantage because of the capital costs of creating new parking. If this site is selected for a pilot program, however, temporary parking can

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easily be created with minimal construction work. The site does have the potential for substantial parking both between the beach and the road and across the road from the beach near an existing maintenance area. We believe that the installation of a culvert and a controlled access point crossing the drainage swale and minimal grading and mowing would provide parking for a substantial number of vehicles with overflow parking across the street for minimal capital cost. A



significant advantage of this new parking is that it would allow the imposition of a clothing-optional beach user/parking fee with a logical control point. (See discussion of user/parking fees preceding discussion of sites.) The installation of new parking avoids the issue of user conflict over parking which would be an issue at the other two sites.

South of North Beach, looking east, prospective parking area

Other Facilities and Services

Since this site is not immediately adjacent to existing developed sites, portable restrooms and lifeguard and concession facilities would need to be installed. This site is, however, readily accessible by service roads and it appears that provision of these facilities would be no more difficult than at the East of East Beach site. Overall, the provision of facilities appears to be a neutral consideration for this site.



South of North Beach, looking south toward pier

User Conflict

Since this site is 0.75 miles north of the fort and the Gulf pier and 0.5 miles or more from the North Beach developed area and since it would not encroach on existing parking, it appears to offer even less potential for user conflict than the East of East Beach site. There is presently some usage of this site despite the lack of facilities and there are beach walkers who cross the area, but with appropriate signage and significant prime

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beach area to both the south and north of the site, and ample space to allow walkers to detour to the east of the site, it appears user conflict can be minimized. Actually our experience at Haulover is that many beach walkers are perfectly comfortable walking through the clothing-optional beach. We believe that this site offers significant advantages in minimizing user conflict.

Desirability/Aesthetics

This site likewise appears to be the most desirable in terms of aesthetics. It is, according to beach evaluators, one of the finest beaches in the United States, and in that regard, it is not unlike Haulover Beach in Miami. This site has no trees or shade, unlike the east of East Beach site, which might be perceived as a disadvantage by some users.

Administration and Management

The openness of this site is an advantage in minimizing management problems with users who might wish to engage in inappropriate behavior in that there are no places to seek cover or privacy.



South of North Beach, extensive open area looking northwest

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Northwest of North Beach Site



Location

Northwest of North Beach is that area of sandbar and dunes that have developed along Bunces Pass including the beach actually fronting on the Pass and the Gulf-front beach southwest of the Pass for 0.25 miles. This area is relatively newly created and is not yet well established land although eight to twelve foot dunes have developed back from the beach. These dunes have been lightly vegetated with typical dune plants. This area is included because of its remoteness from developed areas and the fact that it has historically enjoyed some skinny-dipping use.

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Access and Parking

This site has almost impossible access issues. While parking is available in the existing North Beach site, users have to walk from 0.5 miles to over a mile depending on their approach to the area. In addition, unless they are willing to walk an even greater distance around the south end of the lagoon, they have to wade across the lagoon in water from 6 inches to over 6 feet, depending on tides and the scouring of the bottom by tidal currents.

We believe this site is not appropriate because of the distance from parking and the safety hazards of crossing the lagoon. While a foot bridge could be constructed from the north end of the parking lot across the inlet from Bunces Pass to the lagoon to avoid the wading issue, we believe the distance is still prohibitive.



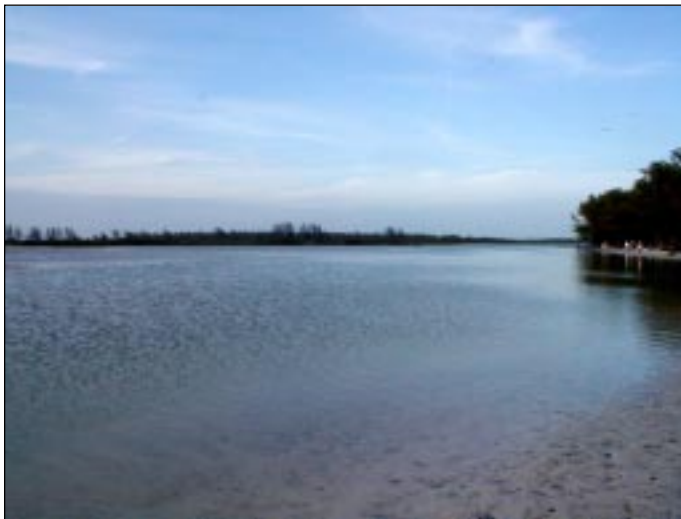
Northwest of North Beach, from North Beach

Other Facilities and Services

Likewise, because of the distance and access issues, it appears that providing facilities and services to this site would be considerably more difficult and expensive than to either of the other sites. While at low tide, it is often possible for vehicles to cross the Gulf front opening to the lagoon, vehicular access is often difficult or impossible at other times.

User Conflict

One aspect of this site that is advantageous is the minimal potential for user conflict. Because of the considerable distances from parking and developed areas and the



hazards of crossing the lagoon, this area has the fewest walkers and other users of any of the sites. It does, however, have both users and people fishing, especially along the pass, as well as passing boaters proceeding to and from the Gulf from the park's boat ramp and points east of the park.

A lone wader crossing the lagoon to Northwest of North Beach. A long walk.

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Desirability/Aesthetics

This site also ranks high in aesthetics as it includes some Gulf frontage as well as frontage along Bunces Pass. The distance from facilities like potable water and concession services, however, makes this site less attractive than the other sites.



The beautiful but remote northwest point of the Northwest of North Beach site.

Administration and Management

Again because of access issues, this site is less desirable relative to management and administrative concerns. The remoteness and the seclusion of the dunes also provide many places where users so inclined may feel free to engage in inappropriate behavior. Given the distance and the frequency of limited vehicular access for park personnel at many times (high tides, storms), it would be more difficult to adequately police and monitor this site.

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Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on this analysis, we believe that the South of North Beach site is the most attractive for several reasons. First, it has enough open space to create entirely new parking, at a minimal relative cost, which will allow the Department to impose a user fee in association with parking. And if the site proves to be as popular as we predict, we will need both the parking between the beach and the road and also overflow parking east of the road. At both of the other sites, new clothing-optional users would be competing with existing users for parking and it would be difficult to use parking as the point for imposition of user fees. Second, the amount of open space is also advantageous in avoiding user conflict and in managing the area. Unlike both other sites, this site is extremely accessible to rangers and is easy to police. It is also relatively easy to control the users as there are no dunes or wooded areas close by. Third, facilities and services could be easily extended to this site as utility infrastructure is already in place serving the North Beach area. Finally, this site is much more aesthetically attractive than the East of East Beach site and perhaps equal to the Northwest of North Beach site.

We look forward to working with the Park Board and the Department to establish a first class clothing-optional beach for Pinellas County and the west coast of Florida.

Views of the South of North Beach Site



Looking south toward the Gulf pier



Looking north toward North Beach



Looking west to the Gulf across the vast beach at the South of North Beach site



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Appendices