



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**North Branch  
Trail**  
*Illinois*



## North Branch Trail

Illinois

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The North Branch Trail follows the North Branch of the Chicago River over 20 miles through Cook County. The trail was originally a dirt path often used for horseback riding; though it's now paved, an unpaved equestrian pathway still parallels the main trail.

Heading north from West Foster Ave, the trail meanders through forests and fields as it parallels the Chicago River's North Branch. You'll travel for more than a dozen miles through many wooded areas and lagoons and along golf courses. Keep your eyes open for wildlife, especially deer. Passing by a mix of residential and commercial areas, it provides connections between communities and an alternative for both commuting and recreation.

Continuing north, the trail features a 4.4-mile loop around

Skokie Lagoons and Erickson Woods. Because the loop's west side runs along I-94, you'll find heavy traffic noise; take the eastern side of the loop for a more peaceful experience.

The trail extends north to Lake Cook Road (which becomes County Line Rd) as part of the Chicago Botanical Gardens, which includes more than two dozen gardens on 385 acres and is definitely worth a visit. Winding through the Garden's McDonald's Woods, the multi-use path provides access to the many beautiful features of the garden. Wayfinding and interpretive signs along the route describe the moraine, wetland, and woodland regions that are part of the Garden's landscape. A wooden boardwalk passes through wetland areas to avoid any damage to the natural ecosystem. There are bicycle racks near the Garden's Visitor Center for cyclists who would like to further explore the grounds. Chicago Botanical Gardens does have an admission fee, but they have free admission days and discounted admission options as well. See their [website](#) for more details.

In partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC), the Chicago Botanical Gardens extended the North Branch Trail first through the Gardens and then through Turnbull Woods all the way to the [Green Bay Trail](#) by the Braeside Metra station in Highland Park. The Green Bay Trail is a busy community route flanked by restaurants, shops, parks, and residential neighborhoods about a mile from the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Open for biking, jogging, or walking, the North Branch Trail extension is a 10-foot-wide asphalt path with 2 feet of gravel on either side and is fully ADA-accessible.

Amenities are plentiful, with parking lots, bathrooms, and picnic areas available throughout the route. Though several road crossings occur along the way, they are clearly marked and have electronic buttons for those crossing.



# North Branch Trail

Illinois

**States:** Illinois

**Counties:** Cook

Length: 21.3miles

**Trail end points:** Blackhawk Rd & County Line Rd (Highland Park) to Foster Ave, west of Pulaski Rd (Chicago)

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt

**Trail category:** Greenway/Non-RT

**Trail activities:** Bike,Inline

Skating, Wheelchair Accessible, Horseback Riding, Walking, Cross Country Skiing

## Parking & Trail Access

Parking is available at a number of locations along the route. View the map for all options and detailed directions.

Parking near the northern trailhead is available at the free public Braeside Metra Station West Lot (40 Blackhawk Rd in Highland Park). The trailhead is across the street from the parking lot on County Line Rd next to the railroad crossing.

For those taking the Metra train, get off at the Braeside Station stop in Highland Park. The Braeside Metra Station platform just across the street from the northern trailhead.

To access the Forest Glen trailhead in Chicago, take Milwaukee Avenue to Devon Avenue. Head 0.2 mile east to the Caldwell Woods Preserve. Take the entrance road labeled Caldwell Woods Groves 1, 2 & 3.

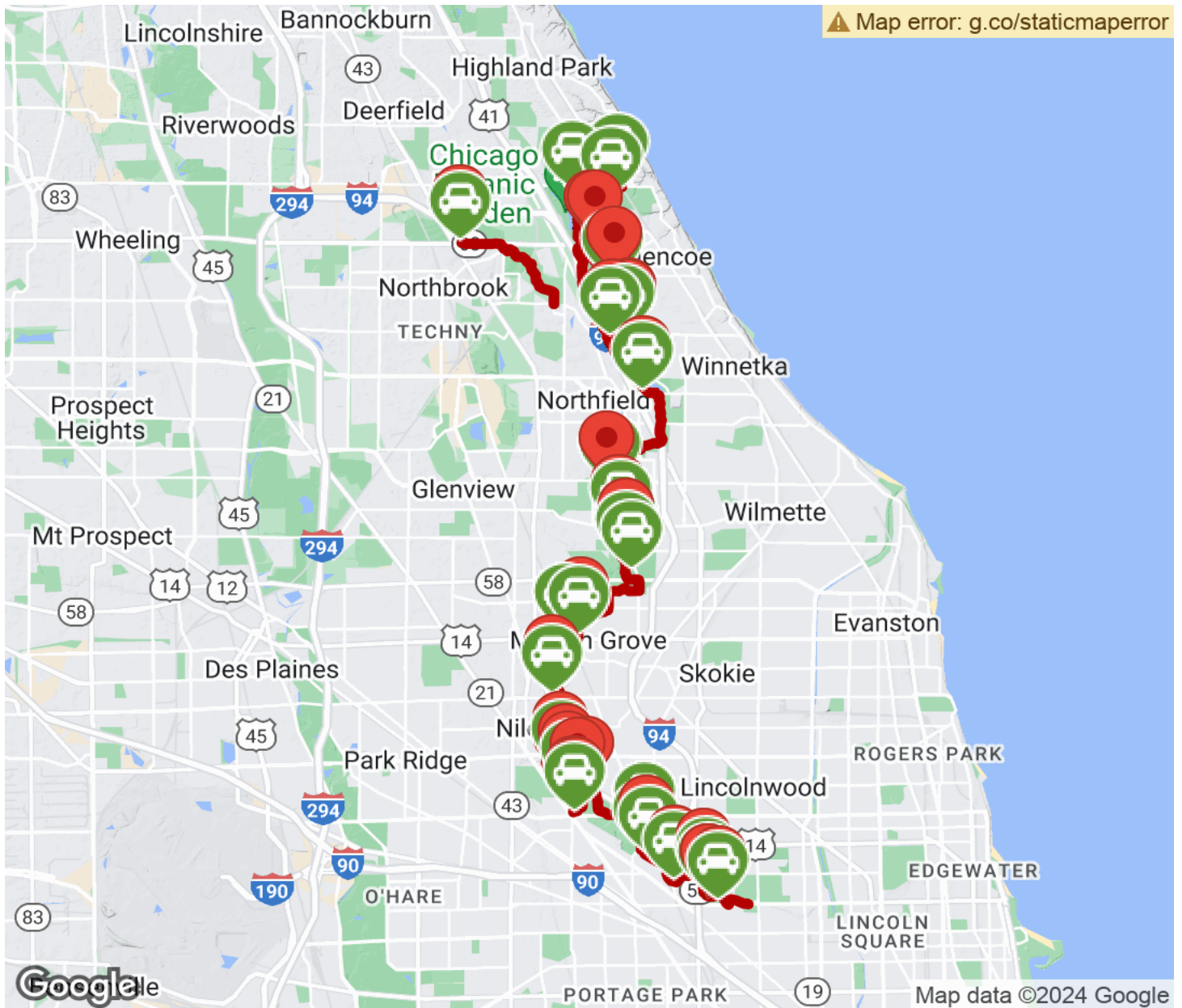
To access the southern trailhead, take SR 50 to W Foster Avenue. The LaBagh Woods entrance is east of Cicero, where there is parking, and the Irene C. Hernandez Family Picnic Grove. The trail entrance is farther east on Foster Avenue, across from N. Kostner Avenue.

Parking is available at the Chicago Botanical Gardens for a fee. Please see their [website](#) for more details.



# North Branch Trail

Illinois



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



**TrailLink**  
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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