



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



# Great American Rail-Trail, Great Plains

*Iowa, Nebraska*



## Great American Rail-Trail, Great Plains

Iowa, Nebraska

*The great plains portion of the Great American Rail-Trail runs through Iowa and Nebraska for 567 miles. The Great Plains region*



The great plains portion of the Great American Rail-Trail runs through Iowa and Nebraska for 567 miles.

The Great Plains region evokes images of America's rural heartland, and Iowa and Nebraska promise much breathtaking imagery along their sections of the Great American Rail-Trail. When complete, these sections will stretch more than 1,060 miles between Davenport, Iowa, and northwestern Nebraska. Thousands of years of geological and climatic events created the fertile soil that now supports a robust agricultural sector, resulting in the pastoral landscapes and rolling farmland one expects on a westward journey. No less overlooked are Nebraska's vast sandhill dunes, which cover about a quarter of the state and comprise one of the largest intact grassland ecosystems in the country.

Communities across the region, many of which faltered after the decline of the railroad industry, have been able to redefine themselves as outdoor gateways and tourism hubs by using trail development as a catalyst for revitalization and growth. Iowa played an important early leadership role in the rail-trail movement; it was the first state to railbank trails after the concept was established by President Reagan in 1983 via an amendment to the National Trails System Act.

The [Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail](#), a key segment of the cross-country Great American Rail-Trail, is just one of many trails that have been created through railbanking.

The development of the railroads played a significant role in the western expansion of the United States through the Great Plains. In 1864, President Lincoln registered an executive order with Congress designating Council Bluffs as Mile 0 (the Union Pacific Line's easternmost point). By 1916, seven railroads—some now existing as sections of rail-trails today—met here to flow passengers westward and eastward. Today, a marker along the [First Ave Trail](#) in Council Bluffs commemorates the historic designation.

During Western settlement, many Indigenous tribes in present-day Nebraska and Iowa were forcibly removed from their homelands. Their histories and resilience are preserved and commemorated in points along the route. Near Crawford, Nebraska, the Northern Cheyenne Breakout Committee is developing a "healing trail" in the area to pay tribute to the many people captured or killed that fall and winter and to support collective remembrance and cultural healing.

To view an interactive map of the entire route, go to [greatamericanrailtrail.org](http://greatamericanrailtrail.org).

The great plains portion of the Great American Rail-Trail is made up of the following trails:

- [Government/Arsenal Bridge](#)



# Great American Rail-Trail, Great Plains

*Iowa, Nebraska*

**States:** Iowa, Nebraska

**Counties:** Antelope, Audubon, Benton, Black Hawk, Boone, Brown, Buchanan, Butler, Carroll, Cass, Cedar, Cherry, Dallas, Dawes, Douglas, Grundy, Guthrie, Hardin, Holt, Johnson, Lancaster, Linn, Madison, Marshall, Muscatine, Platte, Pottawattamie, Rock, Sarpy, Saunders, Sherman, Sioux, Story

Length: 567 miles

**Trail end points:** Nebraska to Iowa

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt, Concrete, Crushed

## Parking & Trail Access

There are numerous parking options along the great plains portion of the Great American Rail-Trail. Please check the individual trail records to see all waypoints including parking, restrooms, and water.