



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail

Iowa



Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail

Iowa

The Wapsi–Great Western Line Trail is a 27-mile pathway on the former Chicago Great Western Railroad. The trail passes through a



The Wapsi–Great Western Line Trail is a 27-mile pathway on the former Chicago Great Western Railroad. The trail passes through a plethora of backdrops, including wide, rolling landscapes, Iowa agricultural land dotted with a large wind farm in contrast to Amish farmsteads, upland timber, wetlands, oak savanna, and a lake. The trail flirts with the Wapsipinicon River as it runs diagonally from the northwest in Mitchell County to the southeast in Howard County.

The Southern Branch of the trail runs from Elma to Riceville. Beginning at the Elma trailhead, the trail heads north, crossing Mead Creek several times along its route. At 170th Street, it begins to parallel the road leading to Lylah’s Marsh County Park; the 32-acre open space offers a lake with boating access, shorefishing, a picnic area,

trails, a playground, and restrooms. Trail users get into Riceville via E Main Street.

The Northern branch of the trail travels through a variety of backdrops, including tree canopies, parklands, farm fields, and a couple small towns, before ending at the Iowa–Minnesota state line.

Heading northwest from the Riceville trailhead, you’ll turn left to cross Addison Avenue and head north up Addison for a few dozen yards; note that the trail can be difficult to spot for a brief period after crossing the street. The trail picks up again and heads east and then north past Watson’s Creek and the 234-acre Lake Hendricks Park, where opportunities abound for camping, fishing, boating, hiking, and more. Here, you’ll also find playgrounds, picnic shelters, restrooms, and even a butterfly garden.

The trail turns left and runs parallel to 95th Street a short way before heading northwest through an agricultural area (its longest straightway) with many stream crossings and picturesque railroad trestles. At 450th Street, you’ll take a sharp left to cross the Wapsipinicon River on a beautifully maintained boardwalk that traverses the surrounding wetlands. There is also an additional short segment just past 430th Street that heads west (left) to Walnut Avenue and connects to a short spur that turns north (right) to connect with 450th Street; if you take the spur, head west (left) on 450th Street to return to the main route. The path then meanders north (right) through an idyllic, well-maintained nature park filled with rolling fields of wildflowers and tall grasses; in the middle of the park, riders will find a convenient resting spot complete with bike racks and a gazebo shaded by large oak trees.

After exiting the park, you’ll head northeast to McIntire; just before reaching the eastern border of town, the trail meets with First Street for a short on-road section (about a half mile). Heading north, go five blocks to Main Street (note that these



Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail

Iowa

States: Iowa

Counties: Howard, Mitchell

Length: 27miles

Trail end points: State Line Rd (Minnesota state line) to Elm St & Orchard Ave to Douglas Ave & 140th St (Elma)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Concrete, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Fishing, Snowmobiling, Walking, Wheelchair Accessible, Cross Country

Parking & Trail Access

At the southern terminal, the trail meets the Old Roundhouse trail at the Elma Welcome Center, which features a covered bridge, picnic area and parking on Elm St & Busti Ave. To reach the Elma Trailhead and Welcome Center from US 63, head west on 185th St., and go 5.9 miles. Continue onto IA 272/ Grove St. for 1 mile, and then turn left onto Busti Ave. After 0.3 mile, turn right onto Elm St. The parking lot will be immediately to your left in front of the welcome center and an arch for the trail that says Old Roundhouse Trail.

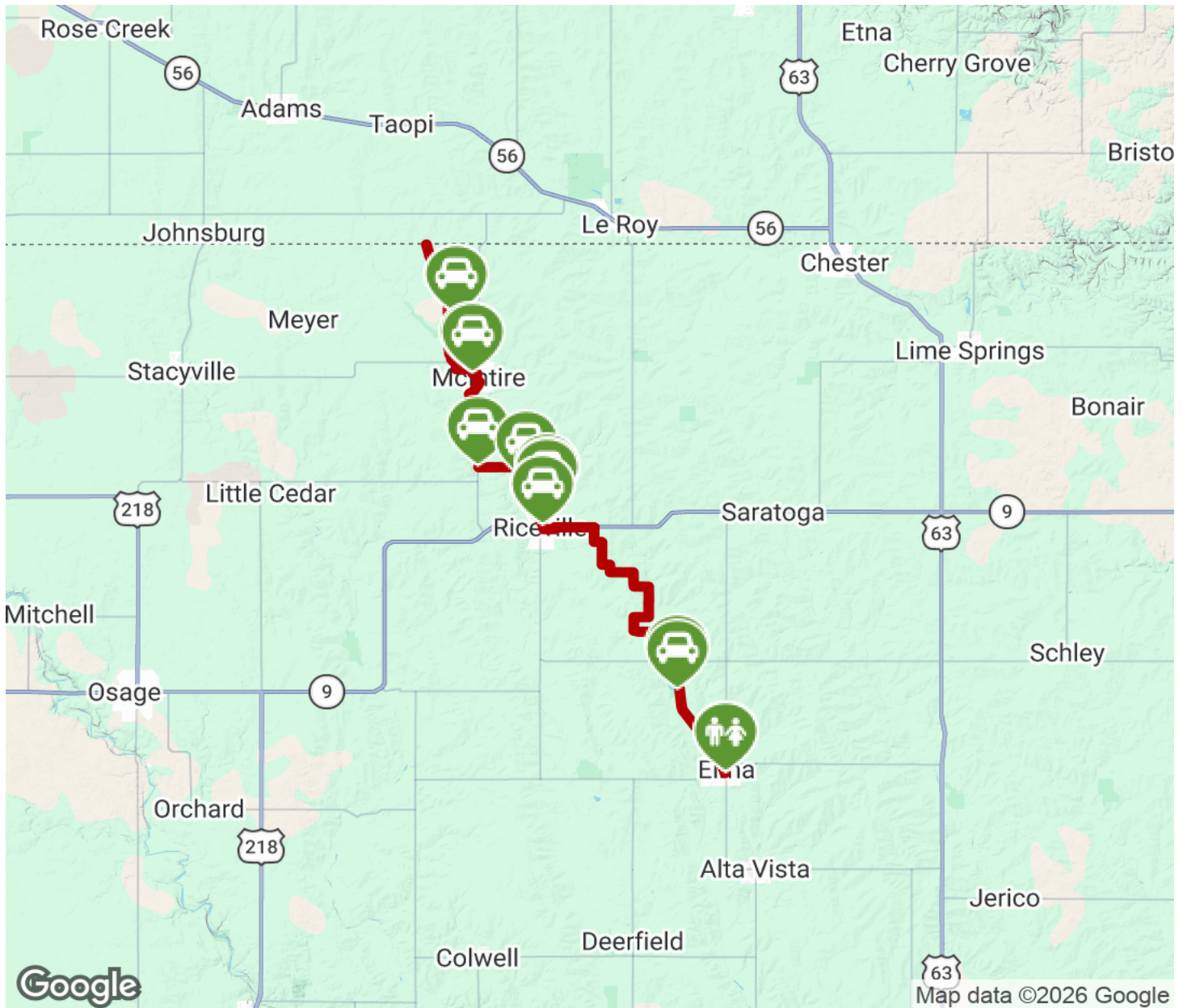
The WGWL Trailhead Welcome Center in Riceville sits on the county line between Mitchell and Howard County in a former pioneer Baptist Church that is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. To reach the trailhead from Riceville from US 63, head west onto SR 9, and go 13 miles. Turn right into the trailhead parking lot just past Addison Ave.; the lot is by the visitor center and has a large stone Riceville sign in front.

The closest dedicated parking for the northern endpoint is in McIntire. To reach the parking area from IA 9, head north onto Walnut Ave., and go 4.7 miles. Continue on First St. for about 0.6 mile. Turn left onto Main St. in McIntire, go one block, and look for parking on your right along the block before reaching Third St.



Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail

Iowa



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

TrailLink.com