



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides   



Prairie Trail
(IL)
Illinois



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The Prairie Trail runs the length of McHenry County and is managed by the McHenry County Conservation District. The rail trail spans just over 26 miles from the Wisconsin border and the farms and woodlands along its northern half to the far-flung Chicago suburbs in the south. Along the way, it upgrades from gravel to asphalt and passes through eight communities, where trail users can food and drink, as well as numerous parks and conservation areas.

About the Route

Starting at the rural Wisconsin-Illinois border, trail users may find the trail is a rough and sometimes muddy mix of dirt and gravel. The junction with Hebron Trail comes up in 0.3 miles as the route passes the North Branch

Conservation Area, where there's parking, drinking water, and primitive camping.

In 1.3 miles, the trail passes through the village of Richmond, partly below grade with street bridges overhead. The trail surface improves to crushed rock as it passes farmlands and a 2.5-mile section of the 3,400-acre Glacial Park. The trail improves once again a mile after leaving the park when it turns to asphalt in Ringwood.

Entering suburbia, the Prairie Trail leaves the corridor and shifts onto local bike paths and bike lanes for about 1 mile in McHenry. Six miles later, just north of Crystal Lake, the trail again leaves the corridor for a 2-mile section through rugged Sterne's Woods, the most forested part of the trail. The hills are short and very steep; cautionary signs warn bikers to dismount and walk down treacherous slopes.

Rejoining the corridor, the Prairie Trail takes a 6-mile downhill grade to Algonquin and the Fox River bridge that sits atop original limestone pillars. The Prairie Trail reaches its southern end in 0.6 miles at the McHenry-Kane county line, where it becomes the Fox River Trail.

Connections

At the northern end of the trail, trail users can connect to the [Hebron Trail](#).

At the southern end of the trail, trail users can continue along the [Fox River Trail \(IL\)](#).

Trail History

The Prairie Trail follows the old Chicago and North Western Railroad. Four Chicago and North Western Railroad lines began serving McHenry County in the 1850s, about 20 years after the first prairie settlements took root. At first, benefiting the dairy farmers and cheese makers, the railroad later



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States: Illinois

Counties: McHenry

Length: 26.4 miles

Trail end points: Anders Park, 309

Southeastern Ct (Genoa City, WI) to 401-499

Souwanas Trail (Algonquin, IL)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed

Stone, Dirt, Gravel

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Fishing, Horseback

Riding, Mountain Biking, Inline

Parking & Trail Access

The Prairie Trail runs between Anders Park, 309 Southeastern Ct (Genoa City, WI), and 401-499 Souwanas Trail (Algonquin, IL).

Parking is available at:

- Glacial Park, 6482 Harts Rd (Ringwood)
- Petersen Park, 4300 Peterson Park Rd (McHenry)
- 366 Lorraine Dr (Crystal Lake)

See [TrailLink Map](#) for all parking options and detailed directions.



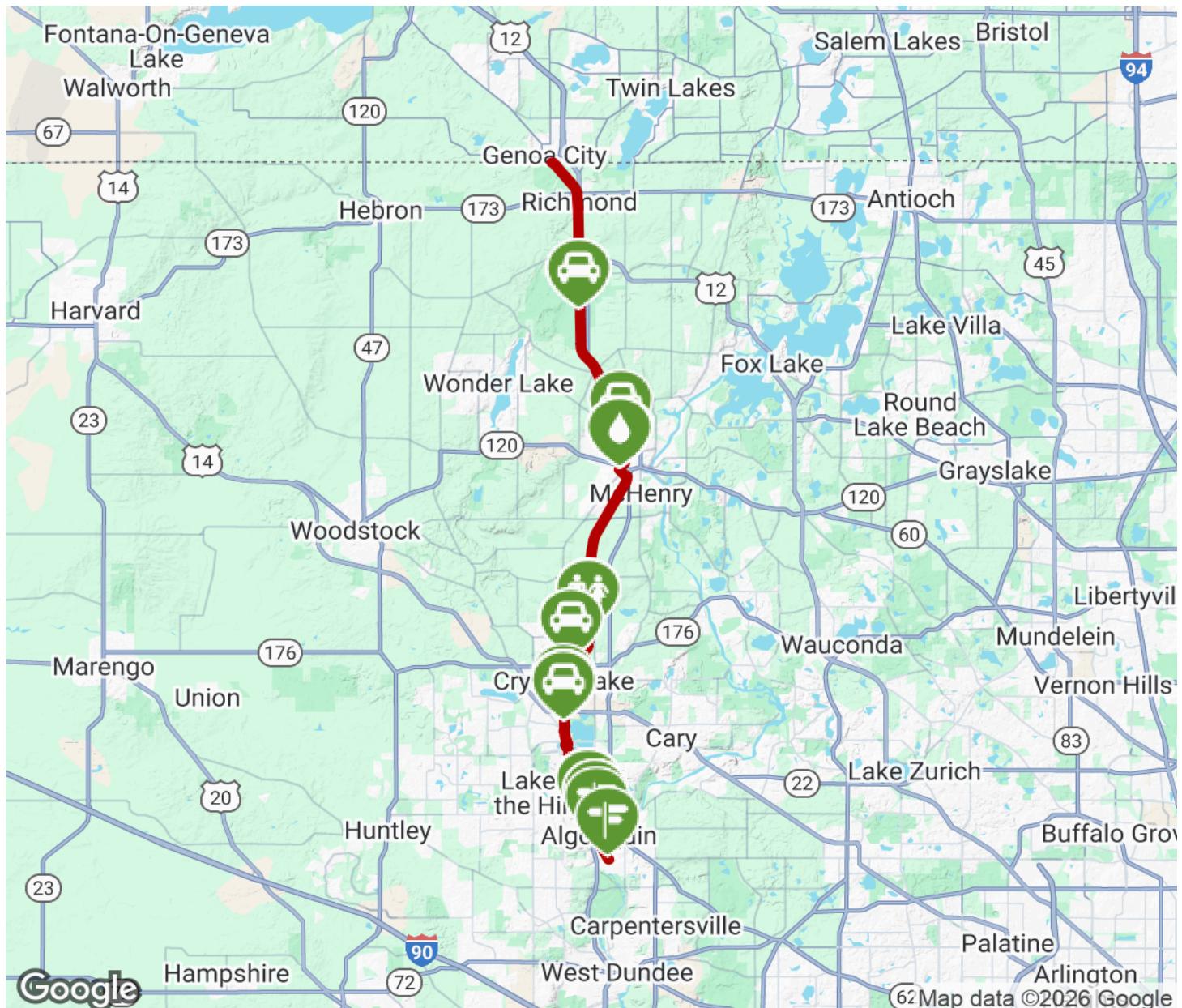
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Prairie Trail (IL)

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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