



2025

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



**Prairie Spirit
Trail State
Park**
Kansas



Prairie Spirit Trail State Park

Kansas

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Spanning 53 miles, the Prairie Spirit Trail State Park runs from Ottawa to Iola, offering plenty of recreation and enjoyment for birdwatchers, cyclists, walkers, joggers and anyone with a desire to explore the heartland—the spirit—of Kansas.

The trail offers visitors a taste of rural, middle America at its finest—rolling pastures, lazy streams, wooded ravines, friendly townspeople, colorful wildflowers, big farms and an endless sky. To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Prairie Spirit, Rails to Trails Conservancy added the trail to its Hall of Fame (August 2011) for embodying the unique natural and cultural history of the region and acting as a vanguard for other rail-trail projects.

Two centuries ago, this area was part of a vast and largely

untouched prairie ecosystem that sustained not only millions of bison and other wild creatures, but also native Kanza and Osage people who hunted game and grew crops here. As European settlers began to move in, so too did the railroads. In 1858 a group of businessmen from Lawrence broached the idea of the first north-south rail line through the state. In the 1860s the idea became a reality with the opening of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Fort Gibson Railroad (which later became the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad).

By the mid-1970s the line fell into disuse; in 1990 it was sold to the Kansas City Terminal Railway Company (KCT), which filed for abandonment not long after. Fortunately, government officials saw an opening to create the state's first rail-trail along this corridor.

Construction began in 1992, and the first section, 17 miles from Richmond to Welda, opened in 1996. The northern 16-mile section, from Ottawa to Richmond, opened in 1998. And the third 18-mile section in the south, from Welda to Iola, opened in 2008. In recent years, the terminus cities of Ottawa and Iola have added an additional mile each, bringing the trail's total to 53 miles.

The trail has proved popular with residents and visitors alike. The variety of ecosystems and geography, including wooded areas, farmland and prairies, makes the trail inviting. It also incorporates urban areas and small towns. Among some of the Prairie Spirit Trail's more notable natural features are the nearby native prairie preserves, including The Nature Conservancy's Anderson County Prairie Preserve, which protects the rare Mead's milkweed and other vanishing species of the tallgrass prairie.

At its northern terminus in Ottawa, the Prairie Spirit Trail intersects the [Flint Hills Nature Trail](#) (at Walnut and 1st streets). From the southern endpoint in Iola, trail users can continue south for another 6.5 miles on the same rail corridor to the city of Humboldt via the [Southwind Rail Trail](#).



Prairie Spirit Trail State Park

Kansas

States: Kansas

Counties: Allen, Anderson, Franklin

Length: 53 miles

Trail end points: Tecumseh St west of N Main St (Ottawa) to Southwind Rail Trail at W Bruner St west of S State St (Iola)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Wheelchair
Accessible, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the northern trailhead in Ottawa: From I-35, take Exit 187 for KS 68. Travel 2 miles west on KS 68 to reach Ottawa (as you approach town, the highway becomes Logan St.), and take a left onto Main St. In 0.1 mile, take a right onto Tecumseh St. and look for the Old Depot Museum (135 W. Tecumseh St.) on your right. Park in the lot adjacent to the museum; the trail begins just across the street from the parking lot.

To reach the southern trailhead in Iola: From I-35, take Exit 155 (US 75), and follow US 75 S. 38.1 miles. Turn left onto US 54 E./W. Mary St., and go 18.7 miles. Turn right onto W. Davis St., and in 0.2 mile, turn left onto W. Bruner St. The parking lot will be on your left, and the trailhead is just west of the lot.

Facilities: Trail restrooms are available at the trailheads in Ottawa, Princeton, Richmond, and Welda. The Santa Fe Depot in Garnett provides restroom facilities throughout the year and is located near the town square in Garnett. The depot serves as a tourism information center as well. There are water fountains at each of these trailheads, and at the Ottawa trailhead, there is also a picnic area.

