



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



## Great River State Trail

*Wisconsin*



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The Great River State Trail is named for the Mississippi River, but Ol' Man River stays mostly out of sight if you follow this 24-mile trail through river marshes, wildlife preserves, hardwood forests, and old river towns on its eastern shoreline.

The trail traces the old Chicago and North Western Railway, which opened a route between the Twin Cities and Chicago in the 1870s. It became disused in the 1970s and was acquired for use as a trail in 1984. A 100-mile length of that former rail route is preserved by Bike 4 Trails, a combination of four state rail-trails—[Great River](#), [La Crosse River](#), [Elroy-Sparta](#), and [400](#)—that roll from the Mississippi River and across the rugged Driftless Area. The Great River State Trail is also part of a designated 3,000-mile bicycle route, called the Mississippi River

Trail, that runs from the headwaters of Itasca, Minnesota, to the Gulf of Mexico.

Beginning in Marshland on Great River Road, you'll immediately enter the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge. The 6,500-acre refuge is on the Mississippi Flyway, so if you time your visit right, you'll be in the company of a vast assortment of waterfowl, wading birds, and migratory songbirds. Watch for offshoot trails that explore the refuge. You'll pick up the railroad grade as you leave the preserve on Refuge Road. About 2.3 miles after leaving the refuge, you'll pass the entrance to a campground for Perrot State Park, which features more wildlife viewing in its rugged terrain of hills, ridges, and bluffs.

Less than 3 miles past the campground, you'll enter the small town of Trempealeau, which provides a nice break with its cafés and parks. Earthen mounds in the vicinity are evidence of civilizations that date back 1,000 years. For the next 10 miles, you'll pass through peaceful wooded areas that provide shade on a warm summer day, and then a series of bridges that span several small tributaries within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Six miles past Trempealeau is Lytles Landing, a boat launch park that provides parking and trail access, as well as a 1,200-foot-long railroad trestle spanning the river.

Continuing south, the trail passes small neighborhoods and pockets of woods. You'll ride alongside Lake Onalaska, an impoundment of the Black and Mississippi Rivers, for a couple of miles before arriving in the heart of Onalaska about 8 miles past Lytles Landing. There are restaurants and pubs here. A 0.7-mile trail gap requires that you follow signs on side streets to Hilltopper and Oak Forest Drives, where the trail resumes.

You'll pass through a warehouse zone and some woods with a bridge over the La Crosse River before you arrive, in 1.9 miles, at the trailhead for the La Crosse River State Trail. This marks



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**States:** Wisconsin

**Counties:** Buffalo, La Crosse, Trempealeau

Length: 24 miles

**Trail end points:** Great River Road/SR 54/SR 35 at County Road P (Marshland) to County Road B/La Crosse River State Trail, east of SR16 (La Crosse)

**Trail surfaces:** Crushed Stone

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** Fishing, Mountain Biking, Snowmobiling, Walking

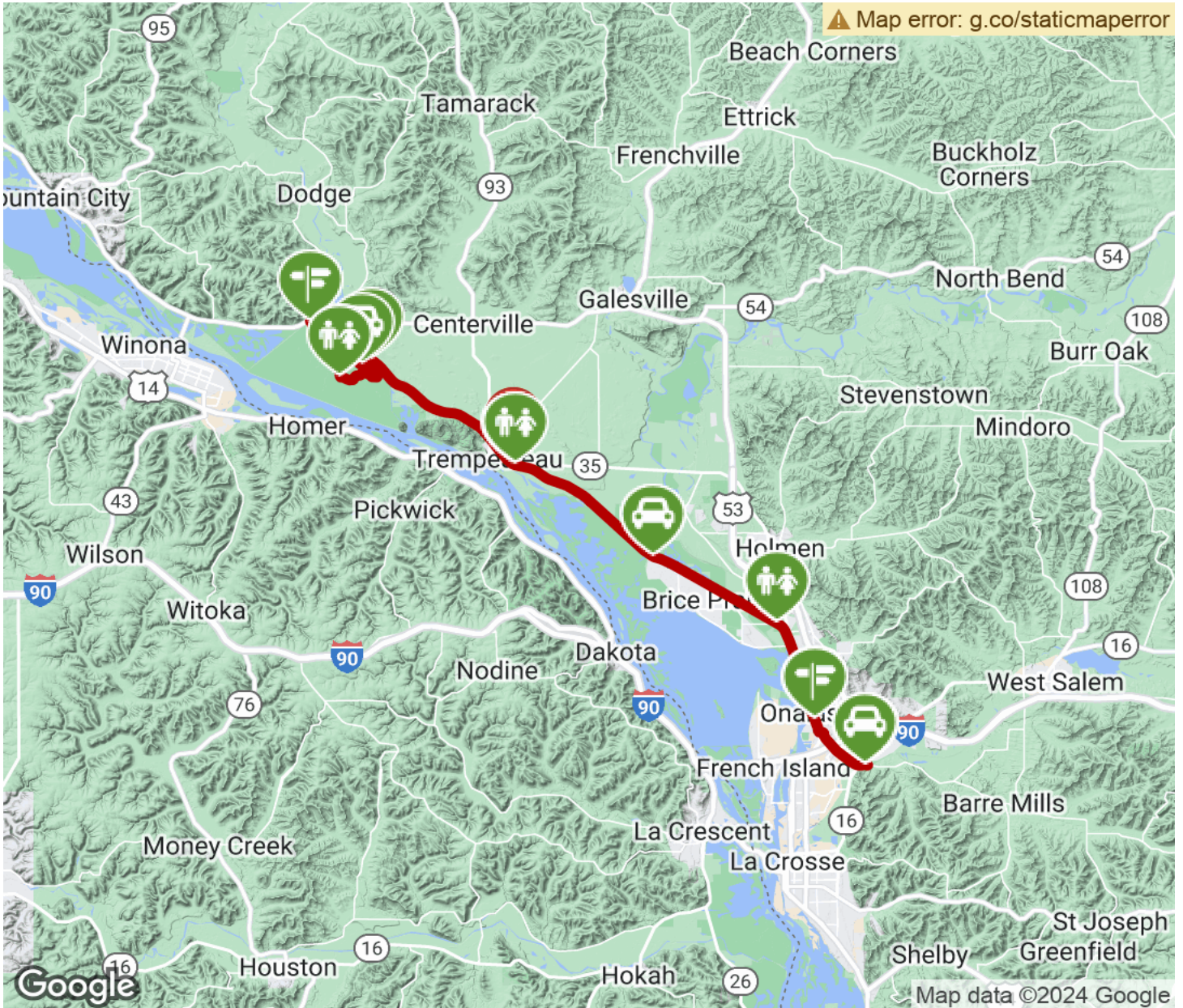
## Parking & Trail Access

Parking is available at multiple locations along the trail. Visit the [TrailLink map](#) for all options, available transit lines, and detailed directions.



# Great River State Trail

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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

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