



2025

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



Neal Smith Trail

Iowa



Neal Smith Trail

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Part of an expansive trail network in the Greater Des Moines region, the 24.5-mile Neal Smith Trail rolls along the banks of the Des Moines River through the Ding Darling Greenway conservation area and makes its way through a variety of landscapes, including riverbanks, wildflower meadows, lakeshores, and dense forests. Plenty of benches offer ample opportunities for trail users to rest and enjoy the deer, rabbits, butterflies, and other critters active along the route.

About the Route

The trail travels near several campsites and recreation areas with water fountains and restrooms, and parking is available at several points along the way. Portions of the trail are maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,

the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the City of Des Moines for year-round access, but note that only the city-maintained portion is plowed during the winter.

From the southern endpoint at East University Avenue—also the northern endpoint for the 3.4-mile John Pat Dorrian Trail—the Neal Smith Trail flows into Birdland Park along the Des Moines River. Portions of this section of the trail are prone to flooding, and trail users are advised to check the trail's website for closures and detours.

Just outside Birdland Park, the trail enters Riverview Park, where it intersects with the short Kiwanis Nature Island Trail and the McHenry Park Trail. At the north end of the park, trail users will come to the eastern endpoint of the 1.3-mile Inter-Urban Trail, which cuts right and then makes a U to cross the Des Moines River, where trail users can also pick up the 3.7-mile Trestle to Trestle Trail to the right. The Neal Smith Trail continues through wildlife-rich forest and wetland habitats following the contours of the Des Moines River.

About halfway along the route, the trail reaches Saylorville Dam, holding back the eponymous lake on the Des Moines River. Saylorville Lake is host to a diverse range of recreational opportunities—including boating, fishing, camping, and more. The trail also passes a visitor center that offers public educational events, including guided rides along the Neal Smith Trail.

The trail continues along the lake's eastern shore through neighboring forests and some incredible wildflower prairie meadows, after which it shares a roadway through the Cherry Glen Picnic Area. Parking is available here during park hours, and the facility has restrooms and water access. The trail continues off-road at the north end of the picnic area on the far side of a large parking lot. A short distance farther, the pathway continues through the Prairie Flower Recreation Area campgrounds on a shared roadway; here, trail users will have access to several restrooms and water fountains.



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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Neal Smith Trail

Iowa

States: Iowa

Counties: Polk

Length: 24.5miles

Trail end points: 8550 NW 142nd Ave. (Polk City) to E University Ave. (Des Moines)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Concrete

Trail category: Greenway/Non-RT

Trail activities: Bike, Inline

Skating, Walking, Wheelchair Accessible

Parking & Trail Access

The Neal Smith Trail runs between 8550 NW 142nd Ave. (Polk City), where parking is available, and E University Ave. (Des Moines).

Parking is also available at:

- Cherry Glen Campground, 4338 NW 94th Ave. (Polk City)
- Saylorville Lake Visitor Center, 8250 NW Horseshoe Rd. (Polk City)
- Birdland Park, 2100 Saylor Rd. (Des Moines)

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



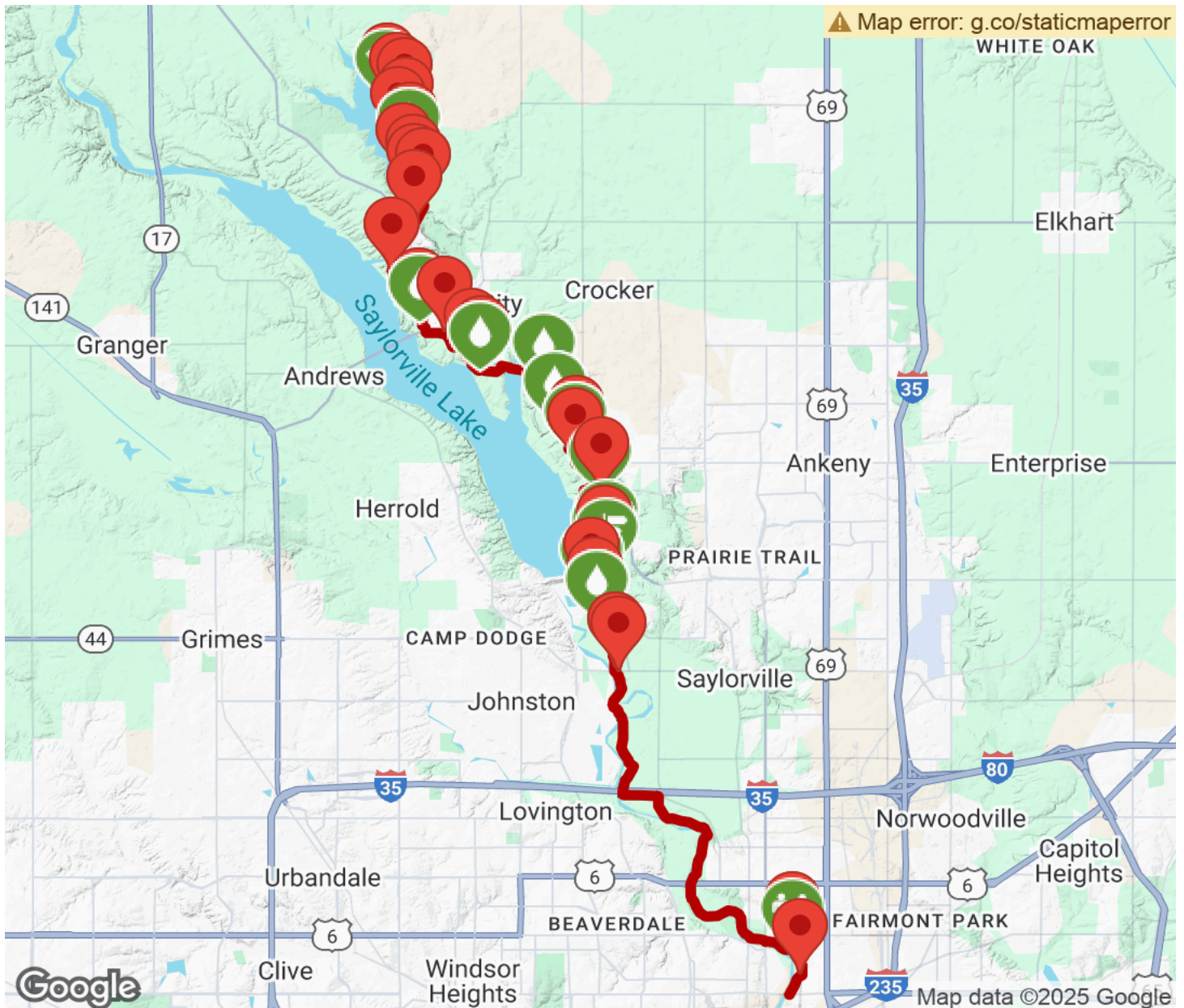
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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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