



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**Prairie Trail
(IL)**
Illinois



Prairie Trail (IL)

Illinois

The Prairie Trail runs the length of McHenry County and is managed by the McHenry County Conservation District. The rail-



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 you'll find food and drink, as well as numerous parks and conservation areas.

Built on the Fox River Valley alignment of the old Chicago and North Western Railway, the Prairie Trail meets the [Hebron Trail](#) in the north and seamlessly joins the [Fox River Trail](#) after crossing into Kane County. It's part of the 500-mile Grand Illinois Trail for its entire length.

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 carried vacationers anxious to escape Chicago's sweltering heat. After World War II, the railroad helped spur growth in towns like Crystal Lake, McHenry, and Algonquin by offering commuters a way into the city. Today, the Metra commuter rail line shares the corridor with the Prairie Trail between McHenry and Crystal Lake.

Starting at the rural Wisconsin-Illinois border, you'll find the trail is a rough and sometimes muddy mix of dirt and gravel. The junction with Hebron Trail comes up in 0.3 mile as you pass 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 ends in 0.6 mile at the McHenry-Kane county line, where it becomes the Fox River Trail.



Prairie Trail (IL)

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States: Illinois

Counties: McHenry

Length: 26.5miles

Trail end points: Southeastern Court near Gideon Court (Genoa City, WI) to Souwanas Trail at Scott St. (Algonquin, IL)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt,Crushed Stone,Dirt,Gravel

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike,Inline Skating,Fishing,Wheelchair

Parking & Trail Access

There is no parking at the two trail endpoints, only trail access. The closest parking locations to the north and south endpoints are outlined below.

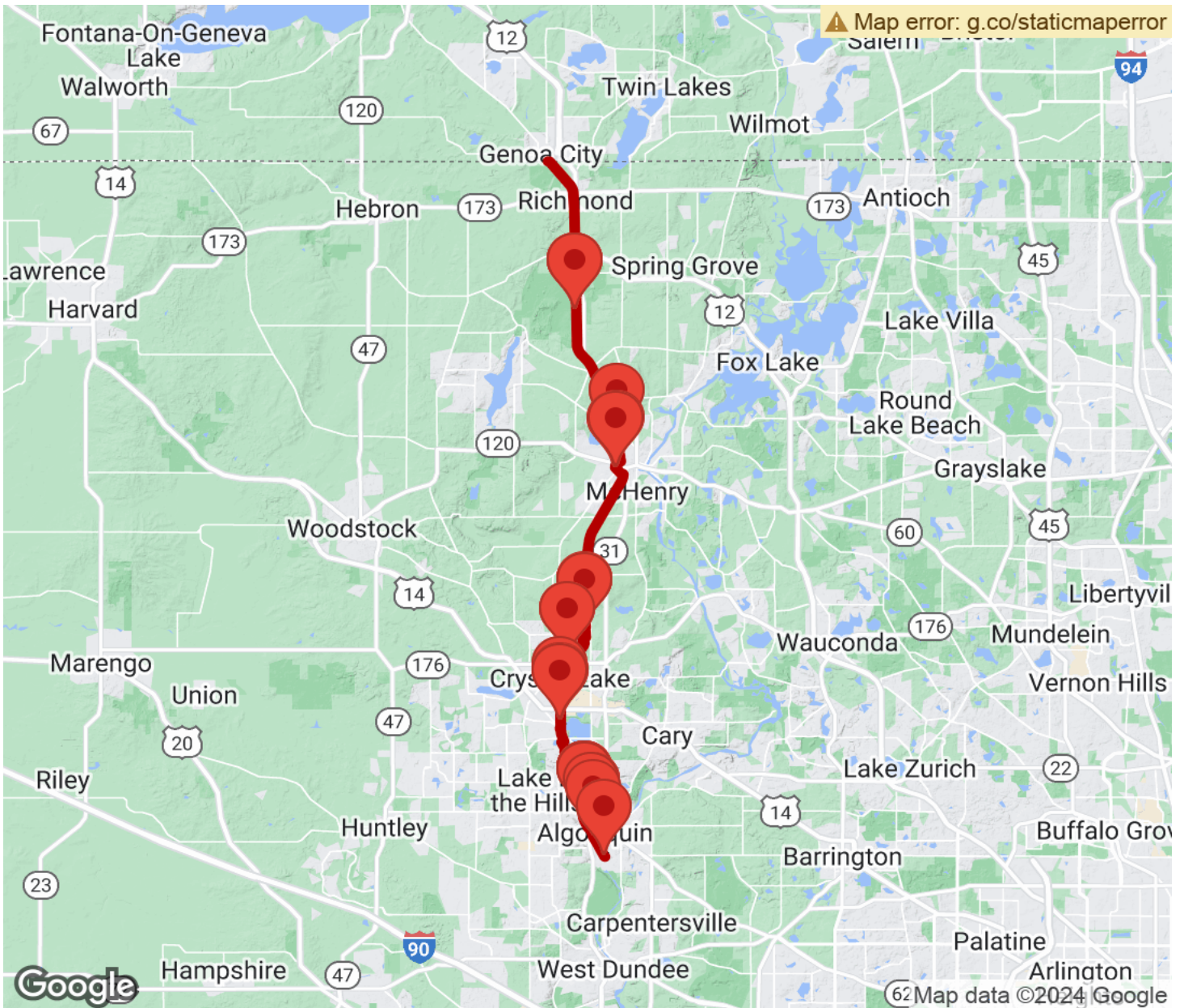
To reach the northern trailhead at the North Branch Conservation Area: From I-94, take Exit 2 for IL 173/Rosecrans Road. Head west on IL 173 for 19.1 miles. Turn right onto Broadway Road, then go another 0.7 mile and turn right onto Keystone Road. The North Branch Conservation Area parking lot is on the right in 0.6 mile. Go 1.4 miles east on the Hebron Trail through the conservation area to the Prairie Trail. The trailhead is 0.3 mile north, just across the border in Genoa City, Wisconsin.

To reach the southern trailhead in Algonquin: From I-90, take the exit for IL 59 near mile marker 60. Go 3.3 miles north on IL 59, and turn left onto Algonquin Road. In 7.6 miles turn right onto Meyer Dr. In about 300 feet, turn left at the first entrance marked with the sign "MCCD Prairie Trail" parking lot. The parking lot is at the end of a 0.1-mile-long driveway. A 0.1-mile trail joins the Prairie Trail.



Prairie Trail (IL)

Illinois



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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