Trail Highlights

- **North Branch Conservation Area** A 1.5 mile trail link connects the Prairie Trail to the Hebron Trail. The oak savanna, sedge meadow, wetland complex and winding banks of Nippersink Creek provide a home to numerous birds, butterflies, fish and wildflowers.

- **Glacial Park** Home to the Lost Valley Visitor Center, this 3,400 acre site lies within the boundaries of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge and includes prairie, savanna, marshes, kames and Nippersink Creek.

- **Petersen Park** Owned and managed by the City of McHenry, offering many recreational amenities.

- **Whispering Oaks Park** Owned and managed by the City of McHenry, this park features Fort McHenry playground and playing fields.

- **Ridgefield Trace** Access the trail at Walkup Rd. in Crystal Lake for 7.5 miles to Lake Ave. in Woodstock.

- **Sterne’s Woods** Owned and managed by Crystal Lake Park District, the area contains Wingate Prairie Illinois Nature Preserve. It is the most wooded and hilly section of the trail.

- **Diverse City Prairie** Native prairie plants, demonstrating the beauty of McHenry County’s original plant heritage.

- **Larsen Prairie** A 20-acre site featuring prairie and fen plant communities offering a display of colors throughout the seasons.

- **Fox River** The trail crosses the Fox River in Algonquin on the original limestone pillars of the railroad bridge. The trail then links to Kane County’s Fox River Trail.
Prairie Trail

including the

Hebron Trail & Ridgefield Trace

Overview

- The Hebron Trail is built on the former Kenosha Division Railroad that carried passengers, mail and freight from Kenosha, WI to Rockford, IL, which ran from 1860 until its final voyage in 1939.
- Glacial Park is home to the Lost Valley Visitor Center. This 1,400-acre site also lies within the boundaries of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge.
- Sterne’s Woods (Owned by Crystal Lake Park District) contains Wingate Prairie Illinois Nature Preserve and is the most wooded and hilly section of the trail.
- Diverse City Prairie, located between Virginia Road and Route 14, was planted with native prairie plants, demonstrating the beauty of McHenry County’s original plant heritage by students from School District 47.
- Larsen Prairie is a 20-acre site featuring prairie and fen plant communities, which offer a display of colors throughout the seasons.
- Between the Kane County line and Route 14 in Crystal Lake, the Prairie Trail is built on the former Chicago and Northwestern rail corridor.
- The Prairie Trail crosses the Fox River in Algonquin on the original limestone pillars of the railroad bridge. South of Algonquin Rd. the trail then links to Kane County’s Fox River Trail.
- Long-distance cyclists have the option to pull-off and tent camp overnight at North Branch Conservation Area, Richmond. April–December, $10/tent. No formal amenities, see website for guidelines. Call for a permit at (815) 338-6223.

Trail Facts

- The Hebron Trail & Ridgefield Trace, the Fox River Trail, the Great Western Trail, and the Illinois Prairie Path.
- Ringwood to Wisconsin line (7 miles)
- Algonquin to Ringwood (19 miles)
- Prairie Trail to Hebron Trail (4 miles)

Trail Etiquette

- Help keep your trails clean.
- Ensure your equipment is in working order.
- Carry supplies for your personal safety and comfort.
- Practice “Leave No Trace.” Deposit all litter and waste in designated receptacles.
- Report concerns or suspicious activity to a S.W.E.E.P. volunteer or call the District’s Main Office at (815) 338-6223, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. for a District police officer; after hours and weekends contact a Conservation District Police officer through the McHenry County Sheriff’s Department at (815) 338-2144.

Trail Uses

- Access trail at Walkup Rd. in Crystal Lake for 7.5 miles to Lake Ave. in Woodstock.
- An original rail ballast/gravel trail offers a travel route for hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders and snowmobilers.
- This paved section provides recreational opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, roller bladers and cross-country skiers.
- While most of the trail is relatively flat, between Lorraine Ave. and Hillside Rd. in Crystal Lake (through Sterne’s Woods) the trail is quite hilly.

Sites open sunrise to sunset.

Whether it’s a morning trek, a family weekend ride or a part of your weekly fitness regime, hike, pedal or roll along over 45 miles of trails offered throughout the county that serve not only as recreational amenities, but as valuable resources that link communities, schools and neighborhoods. Cycling is a great way to enjoy the outdoors, experience nature up close and get some exercise. The Prairie Trail stretches 26 miles from Algonquin to just shy of the Wisconsin State Line and connects eight McHenry County communities in between, including Algonquin, Lake in the Hills, Crystal Lake, Prarie Grove, McHenry, McColom Lake, Ringwood and Richmond. The trail follows the former Chicago and Northwestern rail line that ran from Kane County into Wisconsin.

There are several scenic and recreational stopping points along the Prairie Trail, including the Fox River and Larsen Prairie. Main access points are located north of Algonquin along Main Street in Crystal Lake, at Petersen Park in McHenry, and in Glacial Park north of Ringwood. The trail is opened daily, sunrise to sunset.

From the Prairie Trail, users have access to over 100 miles of trails including the Hebron Trail, Ridgefield Trace, the Fox River Trail, the Great Western Trail, and the Illinois Prairie Path.

Long-distance cyclists have the option to pull-off and tent camp overnight at North Branch Conservation Area, Richmond. April–December, $10/rent. No formal amenities, see website for guidelines. Call for a permit at least 7 days in advance; (815) 338-6223.