



16 Mile Road

Sections



The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT) is a long-distance hiking trail that stretches across eight states from Vermont to central North Dakota. Part of the National Trails System, the NCT links scenic, natural, historic, and cultural areas and allows visitors to experience a variety of landscapes.

When completed, the Trail will be the longest continuous hiking trail in the United States. The total projected length of the North Country Trail is 4,800 miles, of which more than 3,100 have already been completed. In Michigan, the NCT also serves as the hiking route of the DNR's Iron Belle Trail. Newaygo County is home to about 70 miles of the NCT.

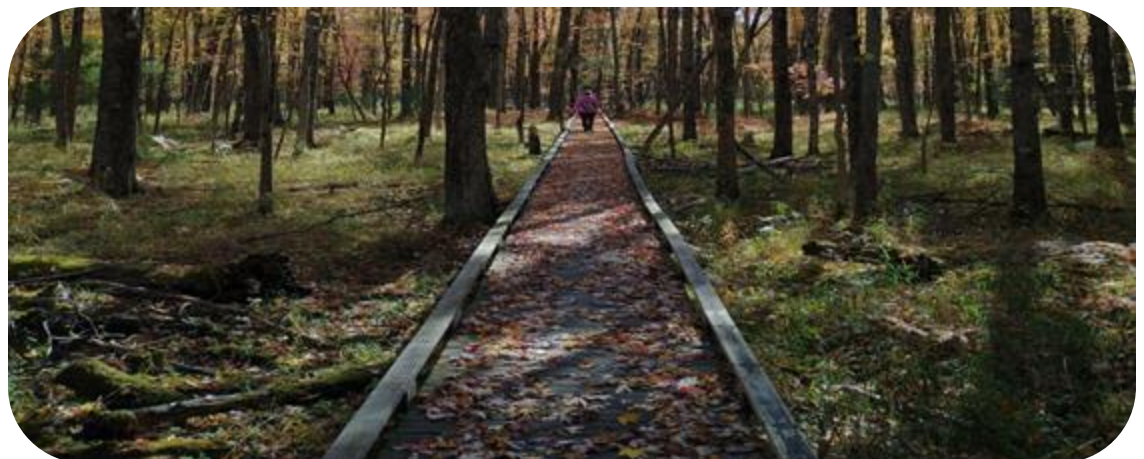
To the North

Brace yourself to enter the eerie splendor of the NCT's version of "The Twilight Zone!" This sometimes dark and always dead-quiet wonderland is the intriguing Sterling Marsh, which is located just north of the Newaygo County line in southern Lake County. Dedicated to loyal NCT Trail Coordinator and veteran, Ed Chappel, an elevated [boardwalk](#) transports hikers across the 1½ mile swampy marsh without having to slog through knee-deep mud and water. Completed in 2011 by the Spirit of the Woods Chapter, it consists of about 2,700 feet of well-engineered, raised boardwalk divided into 13 sections.

The [marsh](#) complex attracts an astonishing assortment of migratory birds as well as amphibians, turtles, muskrats, beavers, and white-tailed deer. Volunteers even conduct an annual frog census here! Wildflowers, aquatic and marshland plants also abound. Sterling Marsh has its own trailhead, parking area, and interpretive kiosk, which provides easy access to visitors. The trailhead is located on seasonal Jenks Road and FS 6241, south of paved 76th Street, west of M-37 and south of Baldwin.

To the South

This lake-studded section of trail is arguably the most visually scenic section of the NCT in Newaygo County. The forested route features hilly terrain punctuated by six picturesque teardrop shaped woodland lakes. Most of these small lakes lie in steep-sided basins that are considered [glacial depressions](#), remnants of the retreating glaciers that once covered Michigan. The lakes are surrounded by US Forest Service land and spur trails lead to four rustic, drive-in [Forest Service campgrounds](#), all within ½ mile of the trail.



Please scroll down for more detailed information.



16 Mile Road Sections

(Updated 5/1/25)

Directions to Trailhead: From Brohman, take M-37 six miles north and turn left (west) onto paved 15 Mile Road. Go 3.3 miles from M-37 to where the NCT crosses 16 Mile Road by: taking 15 Mile Road west to Bingham Ave, then go briefly north to Roosevelt Road, bend left on Roosevelt past the entrance to High Banks Lake Campground, continue north to 16 Mile Road, then bend west and come to a short, paved section of road that crosses Cedar Creek. The NCT crosses 16 Mile Road about 100 feet west of the bridge. Park on the side of the road or drive another couple hundred feet further west to a pull-off spot in the woods.

Northbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT tracks northward for **7.5 miles** from the crossing at 16 Mile Road to the 76th Street Trailhead (in Lake County). This is single-track trail open to hiking only. No mountain bikes or horses are permitted. Dependable water can be gathered at Jenks Creek at the north end of this section, although there are several seasonal creeks, three small ponds north of 96th Street, and a pond at Sterling Marsh where water may be accessible. Be sure to treat or filter all water used for drinking.

Northbound Trail Description: From the road crossing at 16 Mile Road, pass a trail box register several hundred feet north and prepare to encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 3.8 miles:** The initial 1½ miles of trail parallel a swampland on the west side of Cedar Creek (notice the gnawed and downed trees from beaver activity), eventually crossing into Lake County at the unsigned boundary line, and later cross dirt-tracked 96th Street
- **In 2.2 miles:** Traverse the Sterling Marsh eco-system on the Ed Chappel Memorial Boardwalk (see above description), but watch your step (the boardwalks can be slippery in rainy weather), then arrive at FS road 4691 and marsh's trailhead parking nearby
- **In 1.5 miles:** Cross Jenks Road, parallel and cross Jenks Creek, cross paved 76th Street, and bend west to a spur trail turning left (south) to 76th Street Trailhead parking area

Southbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT travels **6.0 miles** from 16 Mile Road south to the Nichols Lake North Trailhead at Cleveland Drive. This segment travels on single-track trail that is open for hiking only. No mountain bikes or horses are allowed north of the North Nichols Lake Trailhead. On-trail water for drinking is in abundance (from lakes) along this section, but be sure to treat or filter all water collected for drinking.

Southbound Trail Description: From the crossing at 16 Mile Road, hikers will encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 1.7 miles:** Cross Cedar Creek on a sturdy wooden bridge, cross dirt-tracked, seasonal FS Road 5311, then traverse upward over forested hills, and arrive at beautiful Highbanks Lake at a signed trail junction pointing left (east) to popular Highbank Lake US Forest Service Campground, located ½ mile on the spur trail on the east side of the lake
- **In 2.7 miles:** Pass successively above:
 1. Sawkaw Lake (several rustic US Forest Service campsites on the south side)
 2. Condon Lake (six rustic US Forest Service campsites on the west side)
 3. Leaf Lake (with great views at several points along the trail)
- **In 1.2 miles:** Descend to the marshy head waters of Leaf Lake, climb briefly up and over a ridge to skirt a wetlands area, and climb to an unsigned spur trail that turns left (east) at the crest to Walkup Lake USFS campground (12 rustic sites, water, and pit toilets)
- **In 0.4 miles:** Back at the spur, the NCT turns right (south), passes a trail box register, crosses diagonally over paved Cleveland Road, and immediately comes to a signed spur trail leading to the parking area and kiosk for the North Nichols Lake Recreation Area (NOTE: Hikers can take a refreshing swim in Nichols Lake by walking south on the access road to a sand beach, picnic area, boat launch, pit toilets, and "waystation" for shoreline habitat for monarch butterflies preparing and their migratory flights south.)