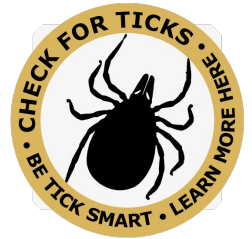


# 56th Street

## 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

Historically, most of the land in this section consisted of fire-dependent [dry sand prairie](#). Ruined by logging and unsuccessful attempts to plow and farm in the 1930-40's, the majority of this area had reverted to desertification. Today, we hike gently through areas of Forest Service restored [prairie](#) land which features desert-like plants, such as the yellow-blossomed [Prickly Pear Cactus](#). Some of the restored remnant prairie land toward the southern end of this section is used for ongoing research.

This unique section will take you through regrown Oak and hardwood forests, old Red Pine plantations, a grove of massive old-growth [White Pines](#) along Bigelow Creek and a few "globally-imperiled" [ecosystems](#). Hikers can make an interesting side-trip into the 400-acre [Coolbough Natural Area](#), a little-known Michigan gem. White blazes lead to a looped trail system to view remnant prairie, Oak savannas, streams, wetlands, and ponds. There is also a turtle study area, large anthills and habitat for the rare [Karner Blue Butterfly](#).

### To the South

Your southbound goal is to cross the [Muskegon River](#), Michigan's 2nd longest river! Historically, the river boasts a rich legacy as a primary waterway for Native American hunting, fishing and trading. Later, it served as a thoroughfare for the lumber industry to [float logs](#) to the sawmills in Muskegon. Today, hikers who descend the series of stepped remnants of the ancient riverbanks, might be greeted with the noise of rafters and tubers who flock to the river on hot summer weekends.

Near the beginning is the newly-developed [Brooks Oak Pine Barrens Nature Sanctuary](#). Created in 2019 by a Conservation Fund grant to the [Michigan Nature Association](#), this 40-acre sanctuary showcases the dry-sand [prairie](#) and dry-mesic forest landscapes found in this specific part of Newaygo County. Because this is a "globally imperiled" [ecosystem](#) and home to rare, savanna-oriented species, there are no trails into this fragile area.



Eastern  
White Pine



**Please scroll down for more detailed information.**

## 56th Street Sections

**Directions to the Trailhead:** Take Croton Drive 6 miles east from Newaygo and turn left (north) on Pine Road, then go left (west) on 56<sup>th</sup> Street where the NCT crosses in about ¼ mile.

**Northbound Overview & Trail Usage:** From 56<sup>th</sup> Street, the NCT makes a wide **5.5-mile** arc to the northwest before dipping back southwest to 58<sup>th</sup> Street. The NCT is single track tread throughout this section and is open to hiking only. Mountain bikes and horses are prohibited. On-trail water is available toward the end of this section at vibrantly-flowing Bigelow Creek.

**Northbound Trail Description:** The first four miles travel over flat terrain through a mix of second-growth hardwood forests, pine plantations interspersed with open expanses of meadow land that includes a patchwork of oak savannas and restored prairie land. The final 1½ mile is mostly forest-bound and crosses Bigelow Creek. Hikers will encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 1.0 miles:** Hike through an old pine plantation, traverse an open meadow/prairie area, turn left (west) into another red pine plantation, and cross paved Oak Avenue
- **In 1.6 miles:** Resume hiking through a mix of pine forests, meadow lands, and patches of restored prairie, then cross dirt-tracked 48<sup>th</sup> Street and Laurel Road, and usually-dry Cold Creek, and arrive at dirt-tracked Poplar Road
- **In 1.5 miles:** Hike through a series of forest and meadow patches, pass by a spur trail to the left (south) that leads around a gate (with a posted trail map) into the north access point to the Coolbough Natural Area and trail network
- **In 0.3 miles:** Cross unsigned, dirt/sand Spruce Road that leads left (south) to the northwest access point to the Coolbough area and trail system
- **In 0.3 miles:** Cross a bridge over Bigelow Creek, the section's only reliable water source, and notice large old-growth White Pines on either side of the creek
- **In 1.0 miles:** Hike up out of the Bigelow Creek watershed, soon pass a trail box register, and arrive at the 58<sup>th</sup> Street parking area

**Southbound Overview & Trail Usage:** The NCT travels south from 56<sup>th</sup> Street for **2.6 miles** to the Croton Dam Trailhead on somewhat hilly and forested terrain. The section is open to hiking only. No mountain bikes or horses are permitted. There are no on-trail water sources until the Muskegon River at the south end of this section.

**Southbound Trail Description:** From your parking spot along 56<sup>th</sup> Street, pass through the following waypoints on your route to Croton Dam:

- **In 1.2 miles:** Briefly enter the trees and break out into a small meadow, reenter the woods and drop down into several shallow, wooded basins before crossing diagonally across paved Croton Drive (NOTE: the Brooks Oak Pine Barrens Sanctuary lies to the west of the trail at about the midway point of this stretch of trail.)
- **In 1.0 miles:** Descend a series of steps or shelves (remnant riverbanks), pass a trail box register, and arrive at the wooded banks overlooking the Muskegon River
- **In 0.4 miles:** Hike along the crest above the river bank, descend to the lower boat launch parking lot, cross the parking and boat launch ramp, walk under the Croton Drive bridge, and climb steps up to the NCT Trailhead, USFS/NCT kiosk, and parking lot