



76th Street Trailhead

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

You're now in Lake County and hiking with the Spirit of the Woods Chapter. As you head north, you follow the watershed above (and mostly out-of-sight) of the Pere Marquette River for about 10 miles and cross over the river at Upper Branch Bridge. The Trail continues to wind its way up, down and around through the Manistee National Forest and near many lakes and rivers.

To the South

Brace yourself to enter the eerie splendor of the NCT's version of "The Twilight Zone!" This sometimes dark and usually dead-quiet wonderland is the intriguing Sterling Marsh, which is actually 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. This trailhead is located on seasonal Jenks Road and FS Road 6241, south of paved 76th Street, west of M-37 and south of Baldwin.

Skunk Cabbage



Marsh Marigolds



Please scroll down for more detailed information.

76th Street Trailhead Sections

(Updated 5/1/25)

Directions to Trailhead: To reach this Trailhead, take M-37 north from Brohman/Bitely, cross into Lake County and turn left (west) onto paved 76th Street (aka Big Star Lake Road). Go about two miles west and turn right (north) to the parking area and USFS/NCT kiosk at 76th Street.

Northbound Overview: You're now in Lake County and hiking with the Spirit of the Woods Chapter. As you head north, you follow the watershed above (and mostly out-of-sight) of the Pere Marquette River for about 10 miles and cross over the river at Upper Branch Bridge. The Trail continues to wind it's way up, down and around through the Manistee National Forest and near many lakes and rivers.

Southbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT tracks southward for **7.5 miles** from the 76th Street Trailhead (in Lake County) to 16 Mile Road. This single-track trail is 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. There are several seasonal creeks, three small ponds north of 96th Street, and a pond at Sterling Marsh where water may also be accessible. Be sure to treat or filter all water used for drinking.

Southbound Trail Description: From the 76th Street Trailhead, take the spur trail at the **north end** of the parking area (left of USFS kiosk) and hike north several hundred feet to a junction with the NCT. Hikers will encounter these waypoints:

- **In 1.5 miles:** At the spur, turn right (southbound) on the NCT and bend around to a crossing of 76th Street, then continue to a bridge crossing of Jenks Creek, parallel the creek and soon cross Jenks Road, and cross FS Road 4691 with trailhead parking nearby for Sterling Marsh
- **In 2.2 miles:** Traverse the Sterling Marsh eco-system on the Ed Chappel Memorial Boardwalk (see Page 1 description), but watch your step (the boardwalks can be slippery in rainy weather), and later cross dirt-tracked 96th Street
- **In 3.8 miles:** Cross into Newaygo County at a unsigned boundary line a short distance south of 96th Street, then proceed several miles to where the Trail begins paralleling a swampland on the west side of Cedar Creek (notice gnawed and downed trees from beaver activity), and in about 1½ miles, pass a Trail register box and arrive at 16 Mile Road