



Pierce 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

In addition to four scenic streams in the initial part of trail, this section's most picturesque feature is certainly 153-acre Nichols Lake. This is the largest body of water directly on the NCT in Newaygo County and 85% of the lake is on Forest Service property. Nichols Lake has no inlet or outlet streams, yet supports a healthy fish population which is popular with anglers. Boat launch areas lie on the south and the north sides of the lake, but high speed boating and wakes are prohibited and gives the lake a quiet, wilderness feel. This also makes the lake very hospitable for migrating birds, water fowl, and [loons](#). Hikers who stop at the North Nichols Lake Recreation Area can take a refreshing swim at the north side beach. The shoreline also provides a habitat for breeding and migrating [monarch butterflies](#).

To the South

The NCT passes through mixed hardwood and pine forests, with a prominent, fire-scarred [meadow](#) (from a prescribed burn) dedicated to the restoration of wildlife, endangered species, and oak savanna habitat. In 2016, the [National Wild Turkey Federation](#) partnered with the USFS and Michigan DNR to develop this 40+ acre meadow, dubbed as *Chuck's Prairie* by locals. Hikers can get up close to the emerging results of this unique partnership.

A delightful off-trail highlight along this section is [Loda Lake Wildflower Sanctuary](#). A spur trail provides backcountry access to this 72-acre preserve, with 1.2 miles of interpretive trail and signage for identifying wild flowers, trees, and plants. The loop trail provides access to the spring-fed lake, a bog/wetlands area, a riparian marshland and boardwalk, old farmhouse and barn foundations, and remnants of the studio of modernist landscape painter, Albert Schmidt. Originally part of a 1,000-acre private preserve, Loda Lake was sold to the Manistee National Forest during the Depression. In 1938, the US Forest Service invited the [Federated Garden Clubs of Michigan](#) to help create a sanctuary for native plants and protected species. This is the only [wildflower](#) preserve in the country located on USFS land.



Please scroll down for more detailed information.



Pierce Road Sections

(Updated 5/1/25)

Directions to Trailhead: Take M-37 north 9.5 miles north to Brohman and take Pierce Road west for 1.6 miles to where the NCT crosses Pierce Road. There is parking for several vehicles on the south side at the edge of a two-track road.

Northbound Overview & Trail Usage: The trail wanders north from Pierce Road **6.7 miles** to Nichols Lake North Trailhead at Cleveland Drive. This section is single-track trail open to hiking and mountain biking and no horses are allowed. The first $\frac{3}{4}$ of this section is very flat, easy hiking crossing four streams, all providing good water sources. At the south side of the Nichols Lake area, the trail becomes hilly as it climbs along the forested rim of the lake basin.

Northbound Trail Description: After leaving the parking area, cross north over the pavement of Pierce Road to where the NCT passes through a log barrier (detering ORV access). Hikers will encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 0.3 miles:** Pass the trail box register and soon cross a bridge over Bear Creek
- **In 2.1 miles:** Cross well-constructed bridges over bubbling West Michigan Creek and Tank Creek (nicely-flowing streams with shady forest cover)
- **In 2.1 miles:** Hike flat terrain, cross dirt-tracked Croswell Road, pass through an old pine plantation, pass a second trail box register, and cross paved 11 Mile Road at the paved entrance leading into the south end of the Nichols Lake Recreation Area
- **In 0.6 miles:** Pass above a wetlands, cross the paved access road to the south boat launch, and reach a carsonite post at a spur trail whose arrow points towards Nichols Lake US Forest Service Campground (with campsites, water, toilets, and picnic tables)
- **In 1.6 miles:** Go downhill from spur, cross boat launch at lake-level, hike briefly along the west shoreline, climb and hike along the forested crest, pass Atodd Lake, and just before Cleveland Drive turn right (east) on spur trail to Nichols Lake North Trailhead

Southbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT travels **5.5 miles** from Pierce Road south to 6 Mile Road. This segment is totally single-track trail and open for hiking and mountain biking; no horses are allowed. There are no on-trail water sources along this section.

Southbound Trail Description: Follow the blue blazes into the woods south of Pierce Road. Hikers will encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 1.3 miles:** Begin a significant ascent of a wooded escarpment whose 130 feet in elevation gain is perhaps the highest on the NCT in Newaygo County
- **1.7 miles:** Cross the open, fire-scarred oak savanna known as "*Chuck's Prairie*", which is US Forest Service habitat restoration site (see description on Page 1), then cross over Taylor Road and soon cross dirt-tracked 7 Mile Road
- **In 0.8 miles:** Arrive at a prominent, signed trail junction for the Birch Grove spur that branches left (southeast) leading (in one mile) to the historic Loda Lake Wildflower Sanctuary. Beyond that, the Birch Grove spur goes about three more miles to end at Diamond Lake County Campground. The side excursion to Loda Lake is highly recommended (see description on Page 1 in "*Scenic & Unique Features*".)
- **In 1.7 miles:** From the Birch Grove spur, continue straight, drop into several pocket marches, cross sandy, two-track Ferris Avenue and then traverse uphill, pass a trail box register, turn right (west) on 6 Mile Road, re-enter the woods in 50 yards, and immediately turn right on an ORV track leading to the 6 Mile Road parking area