**Overview**

The Root River and Harmony-Preston Valley State Trails are located in southeastern Minnesota's Blufflands region. The Blufflands region is a unique, river-dissected landscape with many rivers and streams, such as the Root River, flowing into the Mississippi. Ages ago, these waterways cut deep into the earth resulting in majestic rock outcrops, steep wooded valleys and ravines, and diverse plant and animal communities.

**Fountain**

The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad platted Fountain in 1870. The town gets its name from “Fountain Spring” — the source of the railway town’s water supply. Fountain is the western gateway to the Root River State Trail. Public restrooms and parking are available at the Fountain trailhead.

**Harmony**

The “Biggest Little Town in Southern Minnesota”, Harmony is home to both traditional Amish communities and green industries. Harmony is the southern gateway to the Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail and offers lodging, dining, and entertainment. A trail center, parking, and public restrooms are available at the trailhead.

**Houston**

Settled in 1852, Houston was a steamboat port and the center of railroad transportation. Houston is the eastern gateway to the Root River Trail. It offers a canoe launch, a picnic area, campground and other lodging and dining opportunities. Public restrooms and parking are available at the Houston trailhead.

**Lanesboro**

Platted in 1854 along the South Branch, Lanesboro flourished as a resort town. Lanesboro has a historic downtown district and offers a campground, public restrooms, and parking.

**Preston**

Settled in 1853 along the south branch of the Root River, this community was active in milling. Today the town is the county seat of Fillmore County. It offers a canoe launch, picnic area, campground, lodging, and dining. Public restrooms and parking are available at the Preston trailhead.

**Rushford**

Settled in 1854, Rushford was a major railroad center and mill town. Rushford is home to the historic Rushford Depot, now used as a trail center and museum. Rushford offers a canoe launch, a picnic area, lodging, and dining. A trail center, parking, campground, and public restrooms are available at the Rushford trailhead.

**Whalan**

Platted in 1858 as a railroad town, Whalan was once the tobacco center of Fillmore County. Parking, picnic areas, and campgrounds are located along the trail just outside of Whalan.

**Scavenger Hunt**

Explore the vibrant Root River and Harmony-Preston Valley State Trails. The landscape abounds with a variety of plants and animals and the rock layers of the distinctive bluffs are a virtual treasure trove of plant and animal fossils. While traveling the trail, keep your eyes and ears open, you may encounter one of the following:

- **Little bluestem**: Prairie land along the trail is made up of a variety of grasses, including tufts of little bluestem. This grass has flat bluish leaves that start growing in late spring and keep growing until winter frost. Little bluestem typically grows to three feet and is noticeably smaller than big bluestem, which can reach up to ten feet.

- **Turkey vultures**: Like wild turkeys, turkey vultures have bald, red heads. Turkey vultures eat mostly carrion. They hang out high above the ground and keep an eye out for dead animals. Large birds are often seen soaring with V-shaped wings tipping, slantly, from side to side.

- **Red-tailed hawks**: Whether perched on a branch or soaring through the sky, the broad reddish-brown tail of the red-tailed hawk distinguishes it from other hawks. Even if you don’t see the red-tailed hawk, you may hear its high-pitched screech.

- **Oak trees**: Both northern red oak and bur oak trees grow along the trail. Northern red oaks have leaves with pointed edges while bur oaks have rounded edges. Oak leaves change color in autumn, northern red oaks turn a brilliant red while bur oaks turn green, yellow or brown. The gnarly silhouette of the bur oak is easy to identify year-round.

- **White-tailed deer**: White-tailed deer are the most common large mammal seen along the trail. The white undersides of their tails make them easy to spot. Wild turkeys are black or gray, and males have a red head and wattles—a fleshy flap that swings up and down. The white tail is easier to see in the fall when it is brighter and has a unique white tip.

- **Beavers**: As the trail passes rivers and creeks, look for signs of beavers. This large, furry rodent with oversized orange teeth and a paddle-shaped tail makes its home in the water by felling and stacking branches and logs. If you do not see a beaver, you may see its home or hear the slap of its paddle tail on the water’s surface.

**Rest Areas and Camping Sites**

- Public rest areas are available along the trail in Frazee, and extensive information about the St. Croix River Trail, please call the DNR Information Center at 1-888-MINDEXER or visit mndnr.gov/state_trails.

**Trail Etiquette**

- Stay on designated trails.
- Keep right so others can pass.
- Obey traffic signs and rules.
- Pack out all garbage and litter.
- Respect adjoining landowners’ rights and privacy.
- Wear other trail users when passing by giving an audible signal.
- Overnight camping and campfires are permitted only on designated campsites.
- Do not leave campfires unattended.
- Enjoy the beauty of wild plants and animals, but leave them undisturbed for everyone to enjoy.

Trail users are legally responsible for obeying the rules and regulations provided in Minnesota Rules, State Recreational Trails, 6100.300 through 6100.4300.