The Lowden-Miller State Forest

Nestled in the Rock River Valley, just 3 miles south of the town of Oregon, lies a 2,356-acre wooded area that is one of Ogle County's most beautiful and historic sites. Its scenic qualities come from 120-foot bluffs along 3.5 miles of riverfront forested with hardwood and pine trees. The history stems from the individual who, in the early part of the 20th century, augmented the natural hardwood forest by planting pines – Frank O. Lowden (1861-1943), Illinois' governor from 1917-1921. He ardently embraced proper land use and strongly believed in reforestation as a way to retard soil erosion. Over several decades, an estimated 500,000 trees were seeded directly by him or under his supervision.

Since 1992, the tract has been known as Lowden-Miller State Forest. But prior to that Gov. Lowden and his wife, Florence Pullman Lowden, called it Sinnissippi Forest from American Indian terms meaning "rocky river" or "troubled waters." It was part of a large and diverse farming operation that incorporated, not only native hardwoods, but pasture and sandy farmland. Because the soil was of limited use for crops, Lowden experimentally planted white pines and other tree species to see what would grow productively. The earliest plantings of white pines were here before 1910 and are believed to be the oldest in the state.

The governor's love of the land transcended his desire to continue in political office. In his 1916 campaign, Lowden insisted that he wanted to serve only one term as governor as he preferred to return to his farm and forest. In his biography, *Squire of the Sinnissippi*, Gov. Lowden wrote: "I like to think of this beautiful and fertile spot as the place where my children and my children's children and their children after them will gather long after I have become dust, and in the shade of the old trees my own hand had planted."

The governor remained an avid student of forestry throughout his life. In 1938, he invited the new forestry department at the University of Illinois to conduct research of the developing forest. Today, with nearly 80 percent of all data on Illinois hardwood forest growth having been developed at Sinnissippi, the forest still serves as a field laboratory for the university.

The family's Sinnissippi Forest Christmas Tree wholesale and retail business began providing high-quality firs and pines for the holidays in 1948, and operated until it closed in 2009. In 1955, Sinnissippi Forest was designated the first Illinois Tree Farm.

In June 1992, the state of Illinois purchased a 1,186-acre parcel of the forest from a grandson of Gov. and Mrs. Lowden, Warren P. Miller, and his wife, Nancy. Warren's brother, Philip Lowden Miller and his wife, Bonnie, sold an additional 1,039 acres to the state in 1993. In offering their land for sale to the state rather than seeing it subdivided or rezoned for development, the family said they were achieving their goal of keeping the area an actively managed forest and preserving its beauty for future generations.

Named for the family, Lowden-Miller State Forest now totals 2,356 acres. It is managed by the Department of Natural Resources and is located across the Rock River from another DNR property, Castle Rock State Park, which oversees its daily operations.

Forestry Practices

The Department of Natural Resources' Forest Resources Division has ongoing forestry studies and projects such as controlling some exotic tree species and planting an oak seed orchard. Other forestry projects include thinning pines and working to control tree diseases. The forest's purpose is to provide an outstanding outdoor facility for the public where forestry education can continue.

Parking

There are six parking areas available to the public. Information on the site is available at each lot.

Hunting

The site offers deer, squirrel and turkey hunting. For regulations and permit information, contact the Castle Rock State Park office.

Hiking

Lowden-Miller State Forest has approximately 22 miles of maintained trails available for hiking and cross-country skiing. These trails are open for use year-round except for a few days during the firearm hunting seasons. Check for closing dates at Castle Rock State Park.

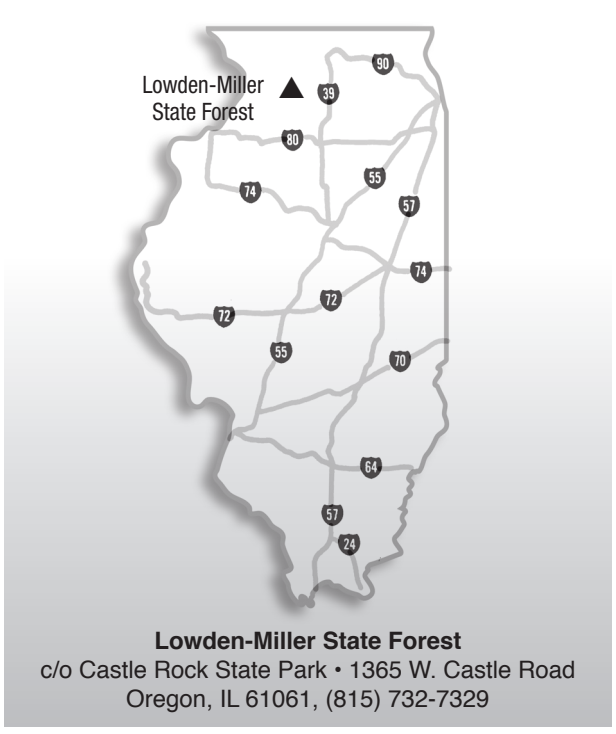
Equestrian Trail

An equestrian parking area and designated horse trails are available. For information on the equestrian program and trail usage, contact the Castle Rock State Park office.

Camping

While camping facilities are not available at Lowden-Miller State Forest, other nearby state sites offer them, including Castle Rock State Park or Lowden Memorial State Park, both near Oregon, or White Pines Forest State Park, near Mount Morris.

For more information about Lowden-Miller State Forest, contact Castle Rock State Park, 1365 W. Castle Road, Oregon, IL 61061, phone (815) 732-7329, fax (815) 732-6742.



Lowden-Miller State Forest
c/o Castle Rock State Park • 1365 W. Castle Road
Oregon, IL 61061, (815) 732-7329

- While groups of 25 or more are welcome and encouraged to use the park's facilities, they are required to register in advance with the site office to avoid crowding or scheduling conflicts.
- At least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors.
- Pets must be kept on leashes at all times.
- Actions by nature can result in closed roads and other facilities. We hope you enjoy your stay. Remember, take only memories, leave only footprints.
- For more information on state parks, write to the Department of Natural Resources, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271 or visit our website at www.dnr.state.il.us.
- For more information on tourism in Illinois, call the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Bureau of Tourism at 1-800-2CONNECT.
- Hearing-impaired individuals may call the Department of Natural Resources' TTY number, (217) 782-9175, or use the Ameritech Relay Number, 1-800-526-0844.

Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, IDNR, One Natural Resource Way, Springfield, IL. 62702-1271; 217/785-0067; TTY 217/782-9175.

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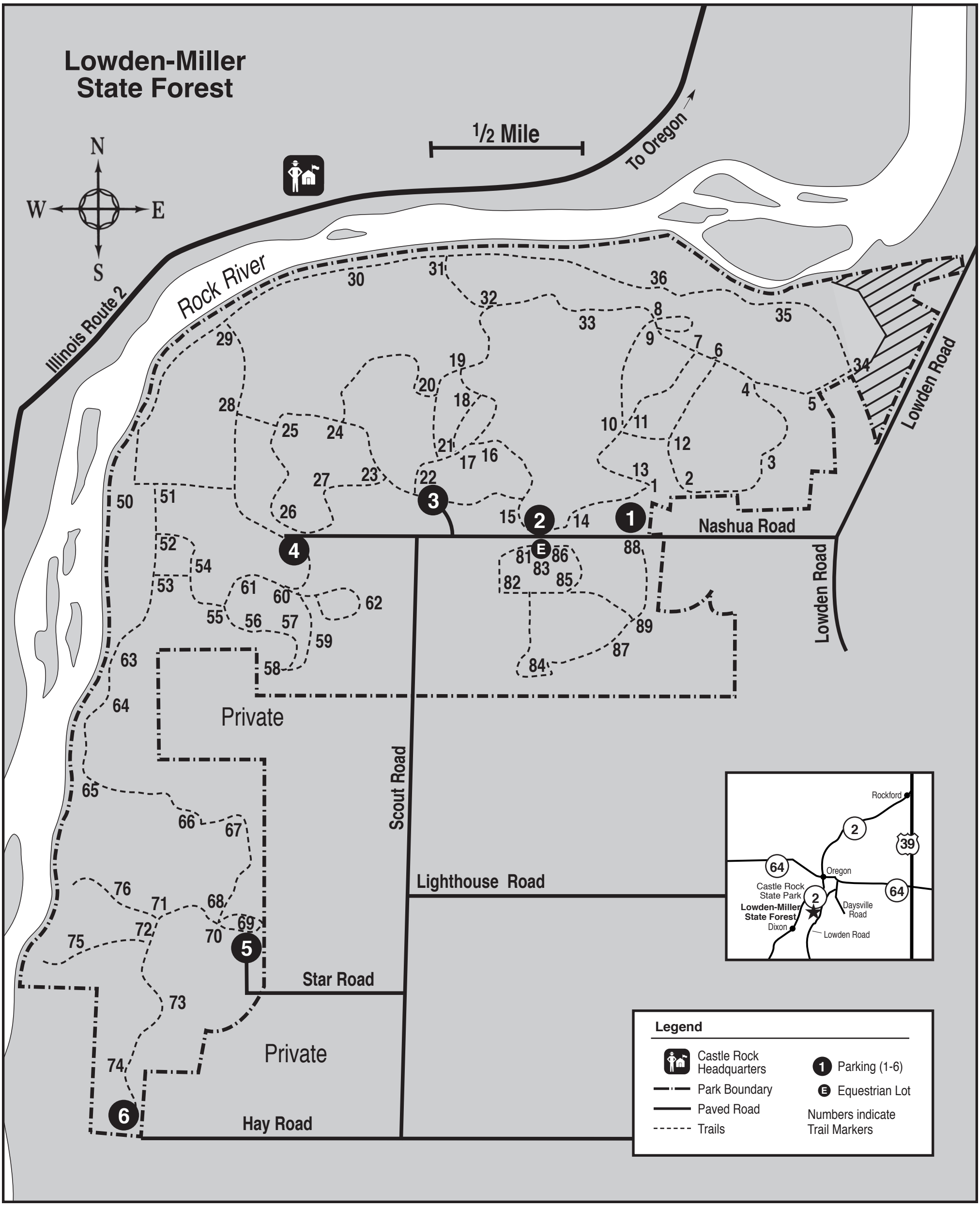
Exotic Species

Plants and animals not native to Illinois are exotic species. Most of them are harmless to our state; however, some can be very invasive to native plant communities and can overwhelm or wipe out native species. Prevention and control of exotic, invasive species requires tremendous cooperation between managers and all users of parks, natural areas, and privately owned land. To learn more about exotic and invasive species and how you can help prevent their spread, visit the IDNR Exotic Species Website at: **http://www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/education/ExoticSpecies/exoticspintro.htm**.