

Lusk Creek, Illinois

1. The region surrounding the river.

a. The Lusk Creek watershed lies in southeastern Illinois in Pope County. It lies entirely within the proclamation boundary of the Shawnee National Forest. It discharges into the Ohio River at Golconda.

The vast majority of this watershed is forested. Dominant trees are blue beech, black, white, and Spanish oaks; shagbark hickory with post, blackjack, and scarlet oaks; and pignut hickory on the drier slopes. Deep mesic ravines have communities of red oak, tulip tree, bitternut hickory, sugar maple, and ash with an occasional black walnut, butternut, Ohio buckeye, and basswood.

The topography of the area is rough and rolling. Many scarps, cliffs, and overhanging bluffs are found in the area.

The major transportation routes of the area include U. S. 45 and State Routes 145, 146, and 34.

b. Population: Pope County has a population of 3,857 according to 1970 census information. The only community on the river is Golconda with a population of 854.

c. Public and private recreation resources in the region

(Pope County)

Shawnee National Forest - basically, the entire county.

Dixon Springs State Park - 400 acres.

Miles of free-flowing river protected at present: 0

Amount of slack water: none

2. River or river segment:*

a. Length: Approximately 23 miles.

Average width: 18 feet

Depth: Pool depth 10-12 feet.

Average depth 3 feet

Seasonal flow: Minimal during the summer months; however there is a continuous flow.

*See Paducah, United States 1:250,000 quadrangle

b. Character of the area.

Lusk Creek is in a natural setting of geological and biological richness seldom equaled in Illinois. Outstanding geological formations of sandstone, limestone, and shale, with fluorspar and other minerals

present are common along the essentially unpolluted stream and its branches. Sheer canyon walls one-hundred feet high and massive sandstone blocks are characteristic of the area. The watershed contains essentially virgin stands of beech, sugar maple, tulip tree, and walnut along the stream with mixed oak communities on the slopes. The vegetation found here varies from species common in the northern Wisconsin bogs and forests to those generally associated with the Ozarks and Texas. Over 800 species of ferns and flowering plants have been recorded. Besides the many extremely rare species for southern Illinois, a few are known from no other area in Illinois. A total of 13 kinds of wild orchids occur here, a number surpassed in no other area in Illinois.

The small alluvial flats support huge trees and an interesting flora of vascular plants. The rich woods along the creek contains species more characteristic of southwestern Illinois, and the limestone hill prairies contain species found nowhere else in the area.

There have been more species of lichens found at Lusk Creek than at any other place in Illinois, and several southern coastal plain species are at or near northern distribution limits in this area. Many species are new to the Illinois flora.

There are 31 species of fish, 17 species of amphibians, 19 species of reptiles, and 26 mammal species known to inhabit the area. Although very little field work has been done on the bird group, 104 species have already been noted. The insects are represented by 20 orders and 180 families, and many other invertebrates spend part or all of their life cycle in Lusk Creek.

History of the area:

The area has considerable evidence of occupation by prehistoric Indians as flint artifacts occur on some of the ridges, and there are several possible archeological sites along the "shelter" bluffs. There is also a rock wall supposedly built by the Indians across the narrow neck of the bend in the creek called the Indian Kitchen area.

Some of the proposed acreage has been cleared and farmed, but the majority of the area is relatively undisturbed.

There has been limited timber cutting in the more accessible places.

There have been several scientific studies in the area. Most of these studies of microclimatic, soil, and biological features have been conducted by Southern Illinois University since 1966 in order to gather evidence for the preservation of the area from flooding as a part of a U. S. Forest Service recreation lake proposal. A research station is located on a 170-acre tract of land owned by the University adjoining one of the tracts proposed by the Illinois Department of Conservation for acquisition.

In 1970 the Department of Conservation acquired 280 acres including the main part of the gorge in the Indian Kitchen area. Of this purchase 85 acres have been dedicated as nature preserve.

c. Water quality: One of the highest water quality streams in the State; minimal pollution from agricultural run-off.

d. Present use of the river is limited to recreation; there are no water resource developments in the recommended area. At one time a recreational dam and reservoir was proposed on Lusk Creek by the U. S. Forest Service. This proposal met with heavy protest throughout the State and to our knowledge no further action in this direction is now under way.

e. River setting: previously described in sections 1 and 2b. See enclosed plat map for land uses.

f. General land ownership: See enclosed plat map.

g. Land ownership breakdown:

Total acres through which the Lusk flows and directly adjacent lands: Approximately 11,241 acres.

1. Federal: (Shawnee National Forest) 6,565 acres - 58 percent
2. State: 280 acres; 1,133 additional proposed acquisition
3. Other public: Southern Illinois University (Carbondale, Illinois) 170 acres.
4. Private: Approximately 3,374 acres

h. Access to river: Access is limited. See Paducah, United States 1:250,000 quadrangle

3. Vulnerability to surrounding influences:

In general there is no known danger to the topography or hydrology of the area as those parts of the drainage basin not proposed or already in State ownership are mainly held by the U. S. Forest Service, and their management should not result in soil erosion or silting.

There is some possibility of damage from mining interests in the watershed although there is no activity on any of the proposed tracts at the present time.

Vulnerability to public works projects:

The point of most concern in recent years has been the proposed recreation lake on Lusk Creek which would flood some of the best areas of natural conditions. At the present time, there is no known activity toward completing this project.

4. Articles published:

Ashby, W. C. 1968. Forest types of Lusk Creek in Pope County, Illinois. Transactions of Illinois State Academy of Science 61 (4).

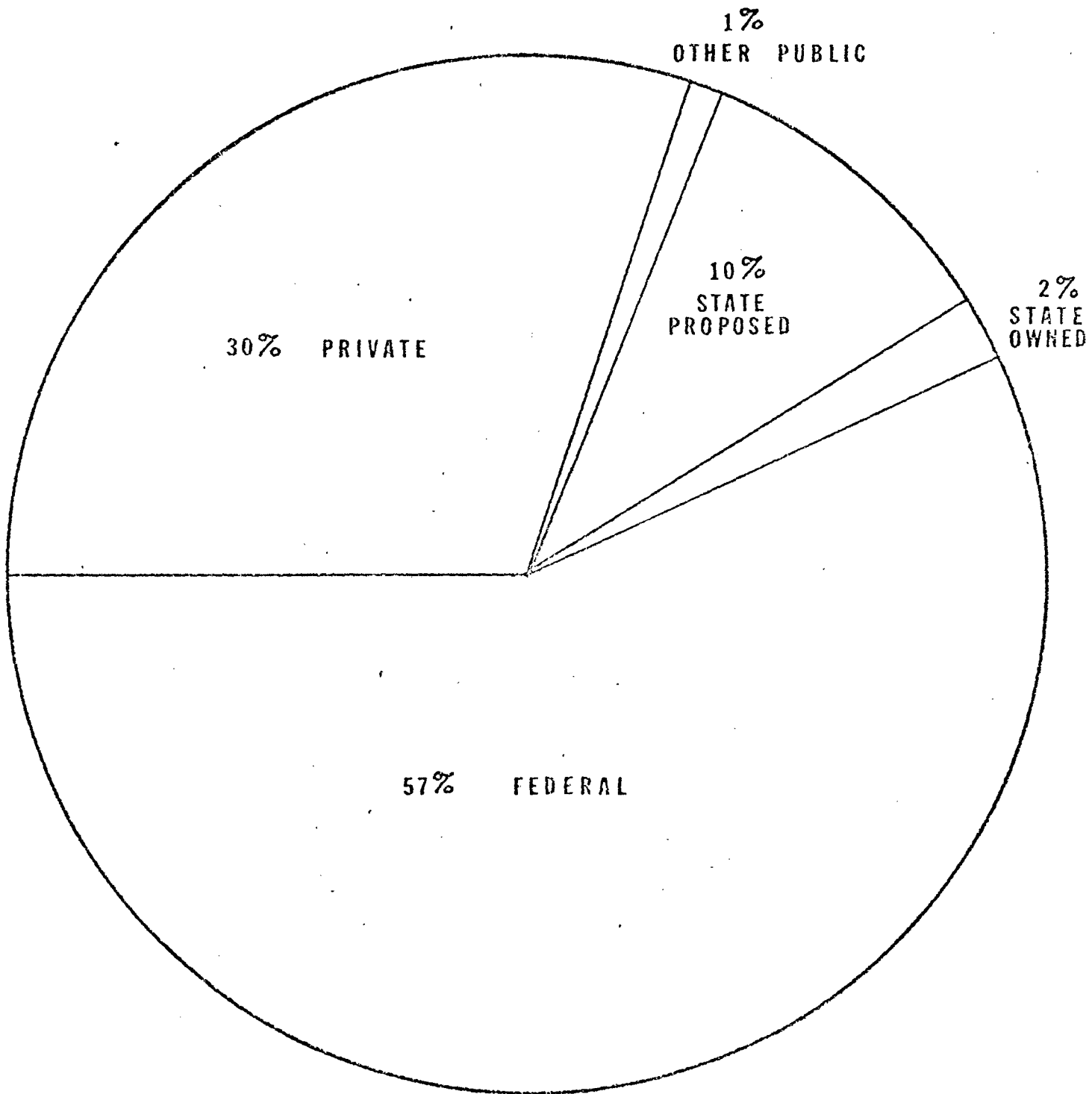
Hopkins, W. E. 1969. The vascular flora of Lusk Creek Canyon, Pope County, Illinois. Castanea 34 (1).

Hopkins, W. E. 1967. Lusk Creek Canyon: A rare place. Outdoor Illinois 6 (1).

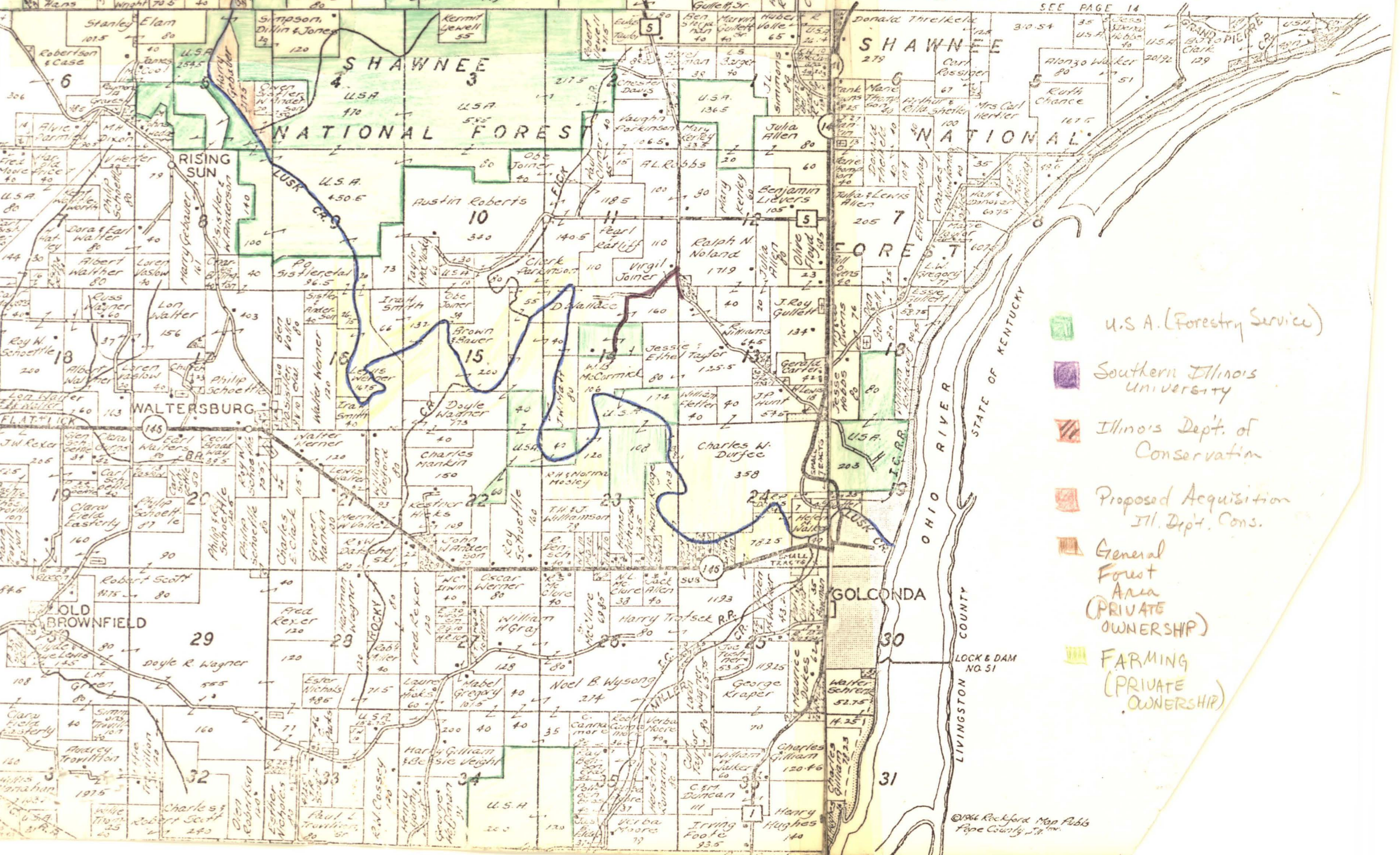
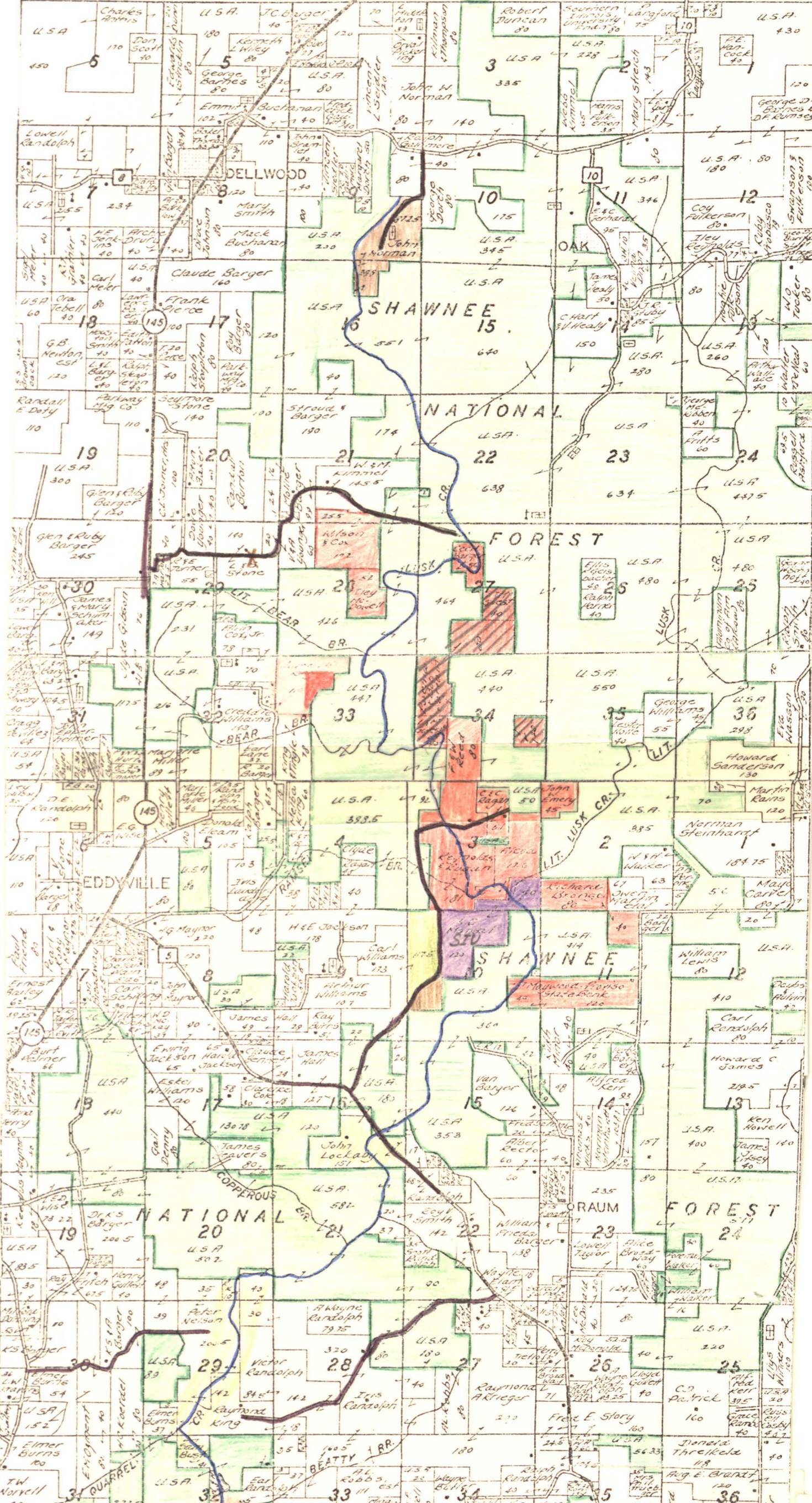
Lopinot, A. C. 1968. A Plan for Illinois Stream Acquisition. Illinois Department of Conservation.

Schwegman, John 1967. Martha's Woods. Outdoor Illinois 6 (2).

Land Ownership Profile



Lusk Creek



- U.S.A. (Forestry Service)
- Southern Illinois University
- Illinois Dept. of Conservation
- Proposed Acquisition Ill. Dept. Cons.
- General Forest Area (PRIVATE OWNERSHIP)
- FARMING (PRIVATE OWNERSHIP)