



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 11 - 13, 2017



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The mid-December MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of December 11 – 13. Although observed wetland habitat was in the “normal” range for November, 2017, virtually no rainfall was received between the November and December survey periods. As a result, wetland habitat observations were very limited. Shallowly managed water was rarely observed across much of the Mississippi Delta. Public lands continued to hold the majority of intensively managed, shallowly flooded wetland habitat and waterfowl were observed responding to these areas. An abundance of harvested agricultural fields have been disked, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl if the fields are eventually flooded. As in most years, flooded habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Mississippi Delta.

Duck abundance estimates were comparable with recent years’ December estimates (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for all groups of ducks except mallards were higher than their long-term averages for December surveys (Table 2). However, mallard numbers did increase from the November survey estimate. Similar to November, dabblers other than mallards comprised about 55% of all duck observations, which is typical for this time of year in Mississippi. Northern shovelers were by far the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, followed by mallards and green-winged teal, respectively. Scaup, ruddy ducks, and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. Reports from both public and private lands over the weekend indicate that mallard numbers have begun to increase across much of the Mississippi Delta. The weather forecast for the week predicts warm weather, but with significant chances of much-needed rainfall for much of Mississippi. A push of cold air from the north is then predicted to persist through the weekend and into next week. Biologists and managers are optimistic this weather could yield an increase in habitat availability, followed by an increase in waterfowl numbers.

The southeastern and northeastern portions of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of ducks overall. Mallards and other dabbling ducks were most abundant in the northeastern region. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the southeastern region.

Mallards were observed most commonly using flooded agricultural fields, followed by moist-soil habitat (natural vegetation such as grasses and sedges) on intensively managed public and private lands. Most dabbling ducks other than mallards, as well as diving ducks were observed heavily using large catfish pond complexes, followed by permanent wetlands such as oxbow lakes and sloughs. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where a large complex of wetland habitat was available.

Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’ geese) were observed during the December survey, particularly in the northeastern portion of the Delta. Also, large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

The remainder of the regular duck and goose hunting seasons will continue on through January 28, 2018. For weekly waterfowl reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey period, 2015-2017.

Species	Survey Period		
	December 2015	December 2016	December 2017
Mallards	139,805	202,135	100,389
Other Dabblers	193,719	460,752	366,802
Diving Ducks	90,958	146,707	208,749
Total Ducks	424,482	809,594	675,940

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey period, 2015-2017.

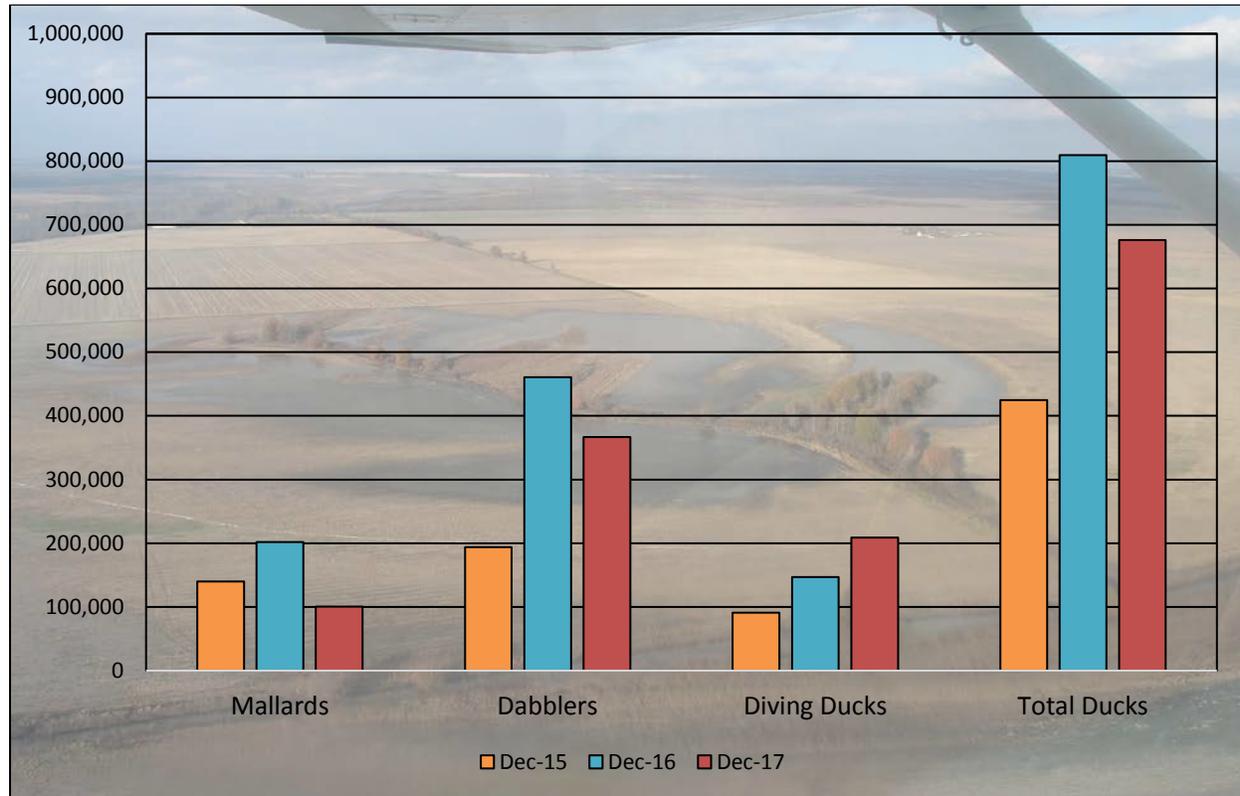
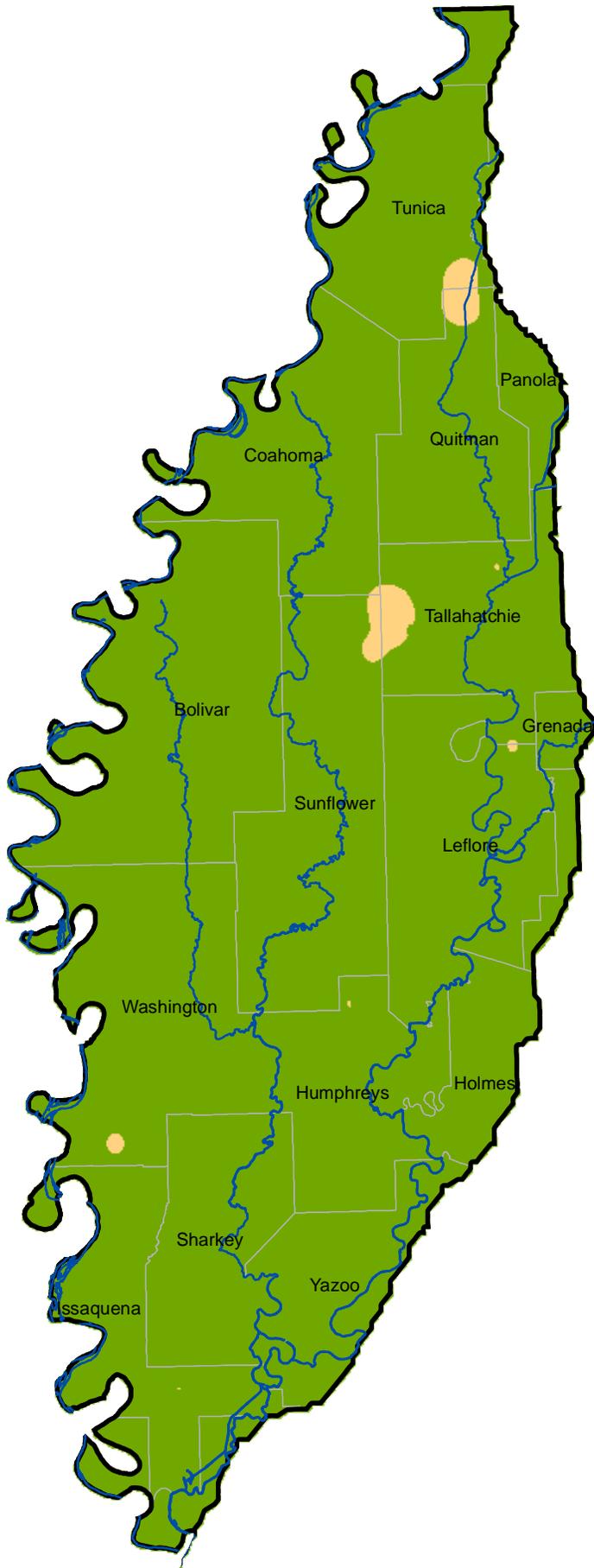


Table 2. Comparison of December 2017 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for December survey estimates.

Species Group	December 2017	December LTA	% Change from Dec LTA
Mallards	100,389	147,362	-31.9%
Other Dabblers	366,802	319,326	+14.9%
Diving Ducks	208,749	123,251	+69.4%
Total Ducks	675,940	589,938	+14.6%

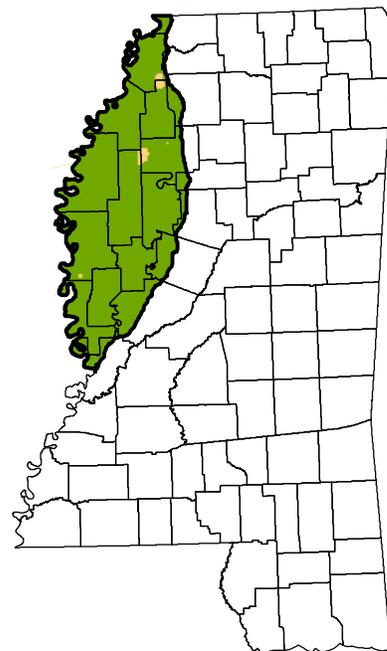
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 11-13, 2017



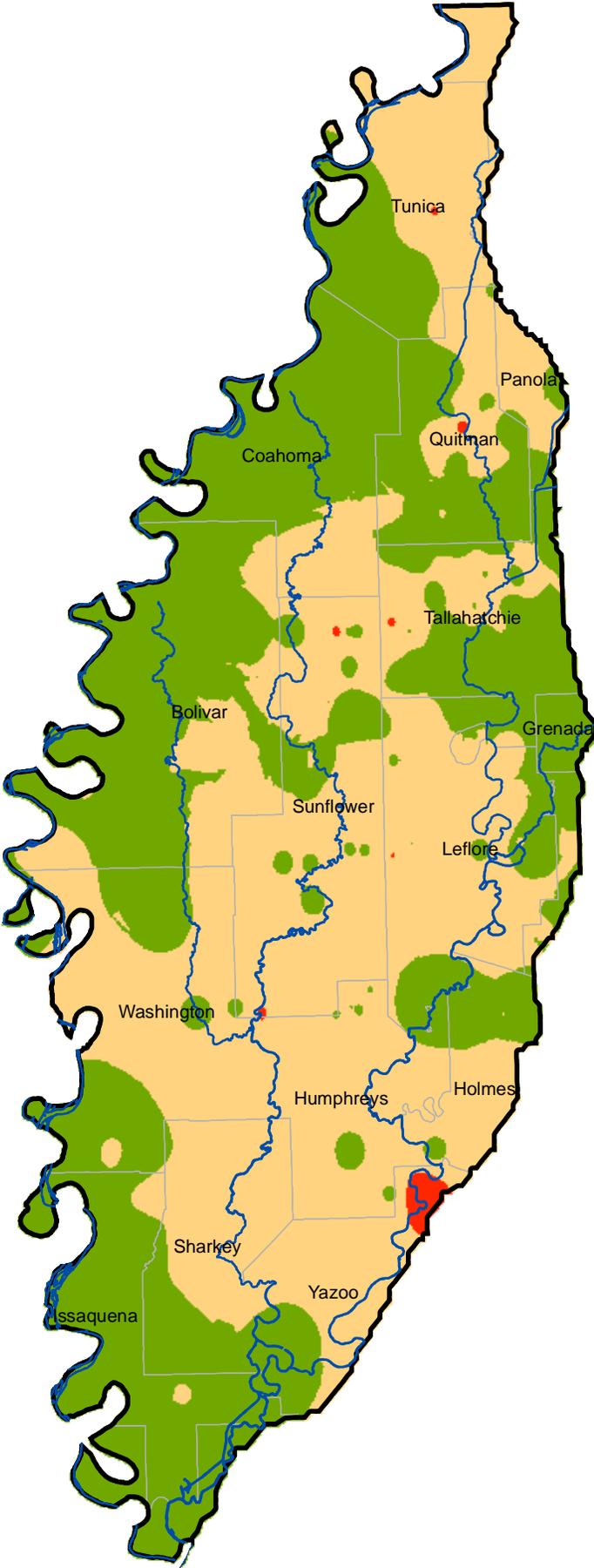
Description

- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



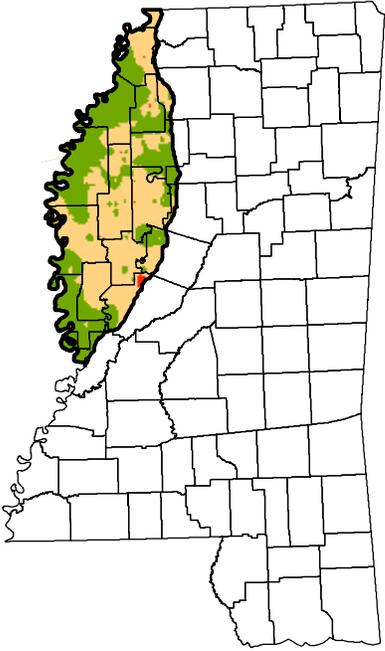
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 11-13, 2017

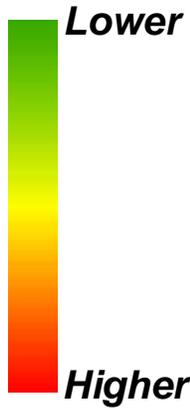


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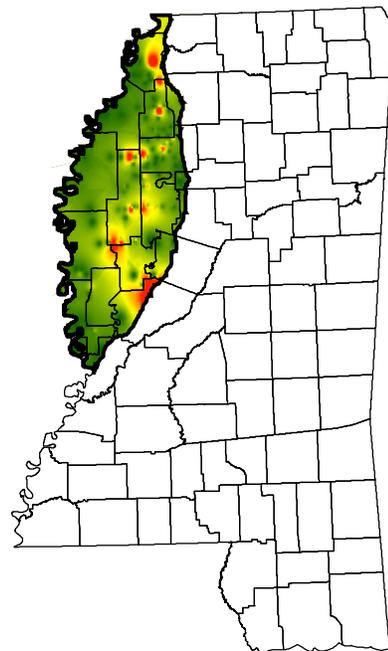
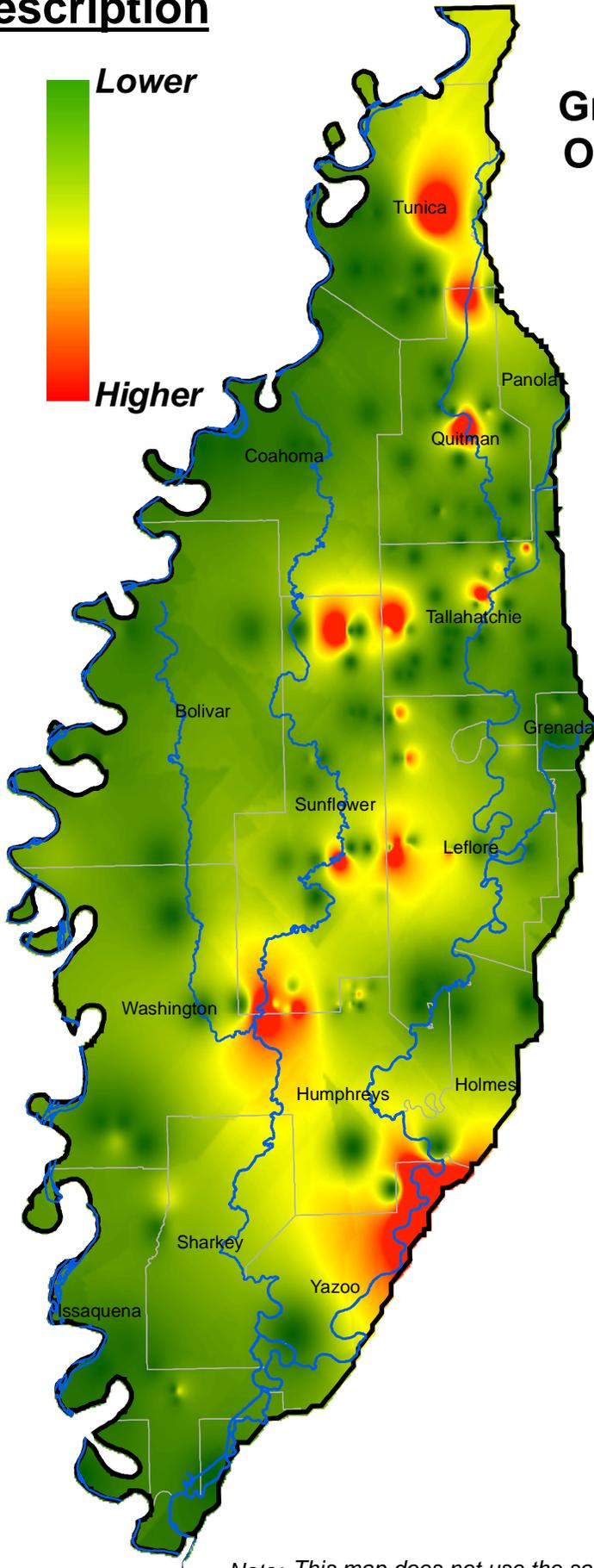
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Description

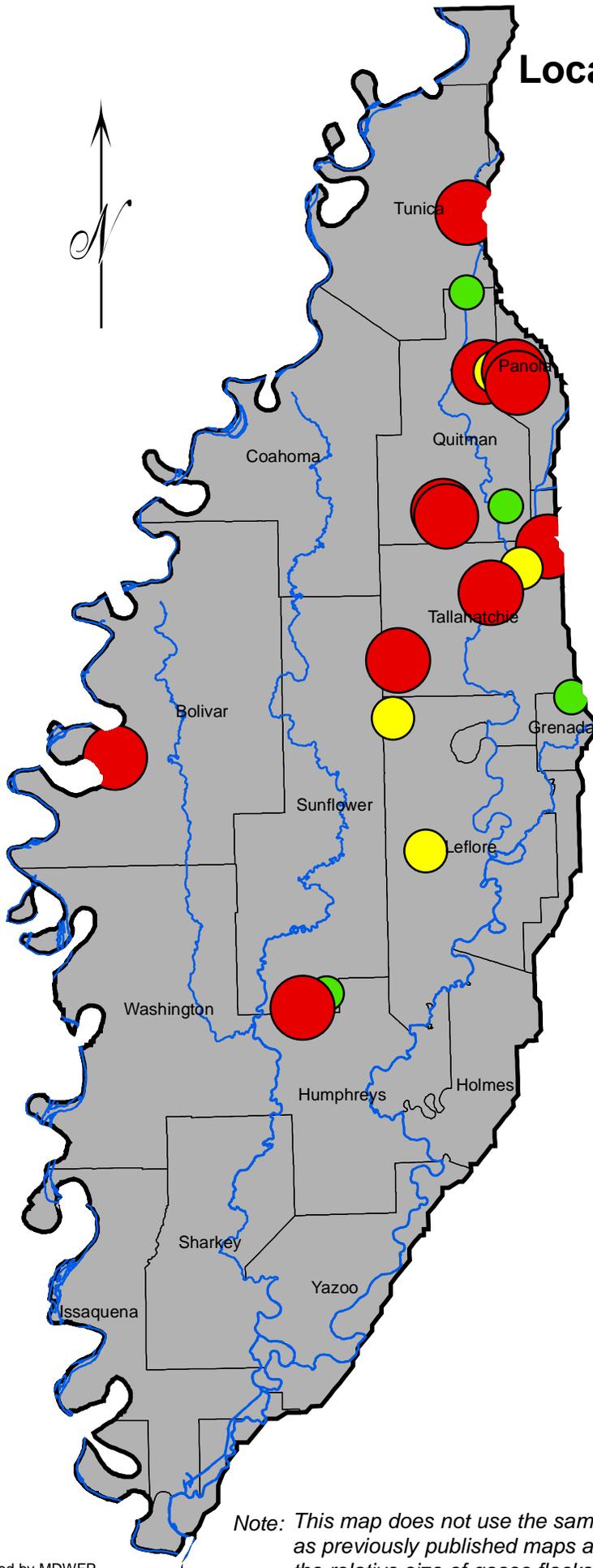


Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 11-13, 2017

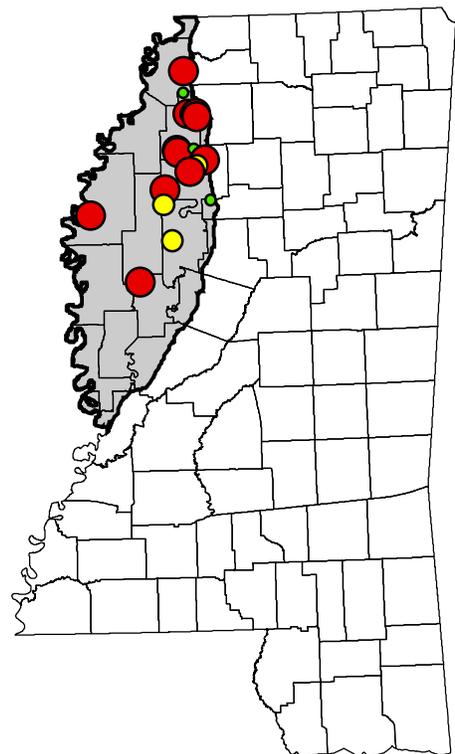
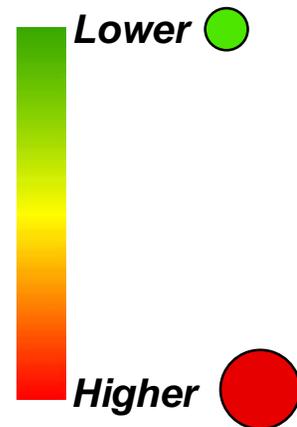


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 11-13, 2017



Description



Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate the relative size of goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta.