MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 19 and 24 - 25, 2018

Prepared by:
Houston Havens
Waterfowl Program Coordinator
and
Alec Conrad
Private Lands Biologist – Delta Region
MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
601-432-2199
houstonh@mdwfp.state.ms.us
alecc@mdwfp.state.ms.us

The late January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred January 19th, 24th, and 25th. Wetland habitat increased since the last survey period due to recent rainfall. As a result, observations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta were more evenly distributed across the landscape than previous surveys. As in most years, number of flooded impoundments generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Mississippi Delta. However, many small low-lying, rainfall-dependent areas were scattered across all regions of the Delta.

Although duck abundance estimates decreased from the peak numbers in early January, estimates remained high for this time of year and were comparable to recent years (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for all groups of ducks except divers remained substantially higher than their long-term averages for late January surveys (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 60% of all duck observations while mallards made up about 35% of all observations. Mallards remained by far the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, followed by gadwall. Diving duck estimates remained similar to early January numbers, which were very low. Scaup and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. Reports from many public and private lands indicate that duck numbers have decreased somewhat across the Mississippi Delta, but numbers are still relatively high in many areas. The weather forecast for the final weekend of the waterfowl hunting season predicts warm and rainy conditions.

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

As expected, mallards and other dabblers were observed most commonly using newly flooded areas of agricultural fields following the rainfall received earlier this week. Ducks were commonly observed in small, scattered “pockets” of shallow water or along the leading edges of the water in large flooded fields. In contrast to the early January survey, ducks were highly distributed across the Delta with very few large concentrations. Biologists speculate that following the previous week’s icy conditions, dabbling ducks quickly responded to newly flooded food resources to meet energy demands. Some species of ducks also tend to seek out more secluded habitats with dense vegetation during late winter, rather than congregating in large groups as they did earlier in the hunting season. These dense habitats provide cover from harsh weather, and also provide abundant aquatic invertebrates as many species of ducks begin to shift food preferences from high carbohydrate content to more protein-rich foods. Several large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’) were observed during this survey, but numbers of geese in general decreased from earlier this month. Large numbers of greater white-fronted geese continued using large dry agricultural fields and levees around catfish ponds.

After the regular waterfowl hunting seasons end on January 28, the post season light goose conservation order will resume and will occur January 29 – February 2 and February 4 – March 31. There will be a statewide youth waterfowl hunting day on February 3. Hunters are encouraged to check Wildlife Management Area and other public land regulations for opportunities during the conservation order and youth waterfowl hunting day. 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 late January survey period, 2016-2018.

Species	**Survey Period**		
	Late Jan 2016	Late Jan 2017	Late Jan 2018
Mallards	307,177	267,078	334,140
Other Dabblers	482,843	483,037	516,240
Diving Ducks	206,983	106,419	45,587
Total Ducks	997,003	815,903	895,968

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey period, 2016-2018.

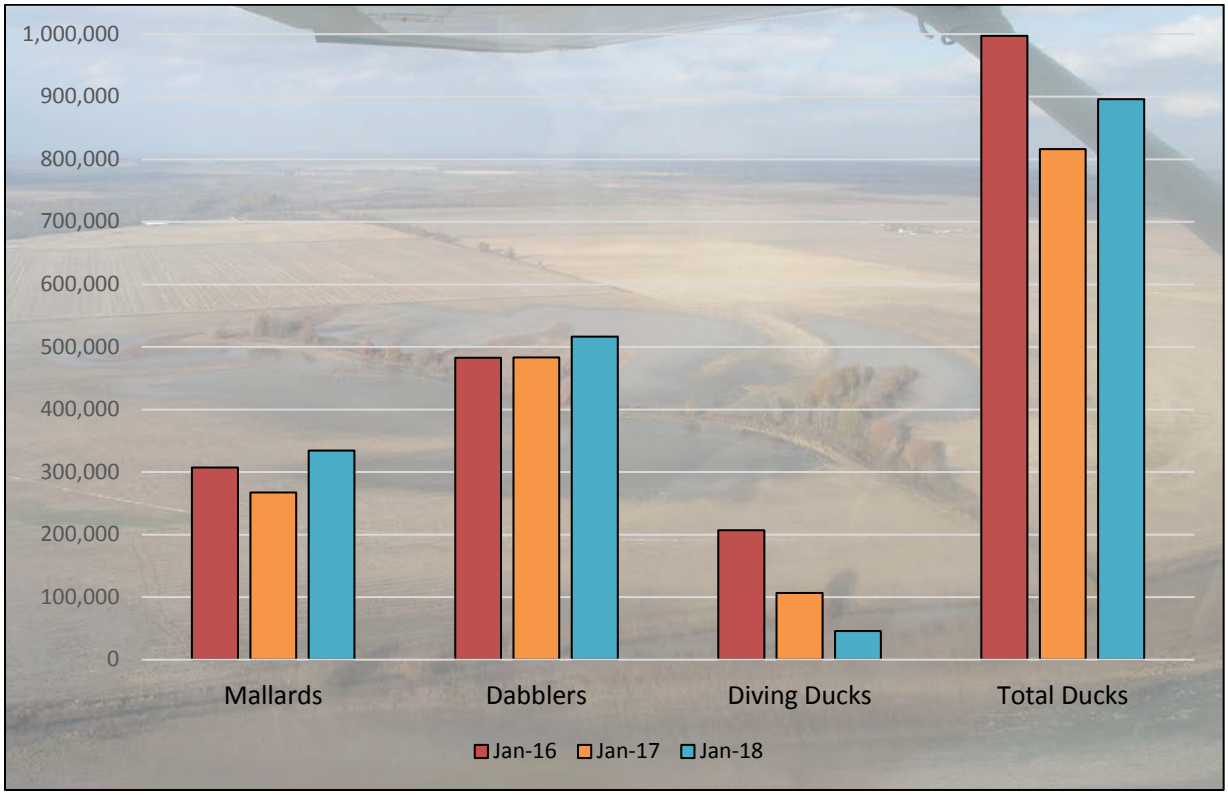
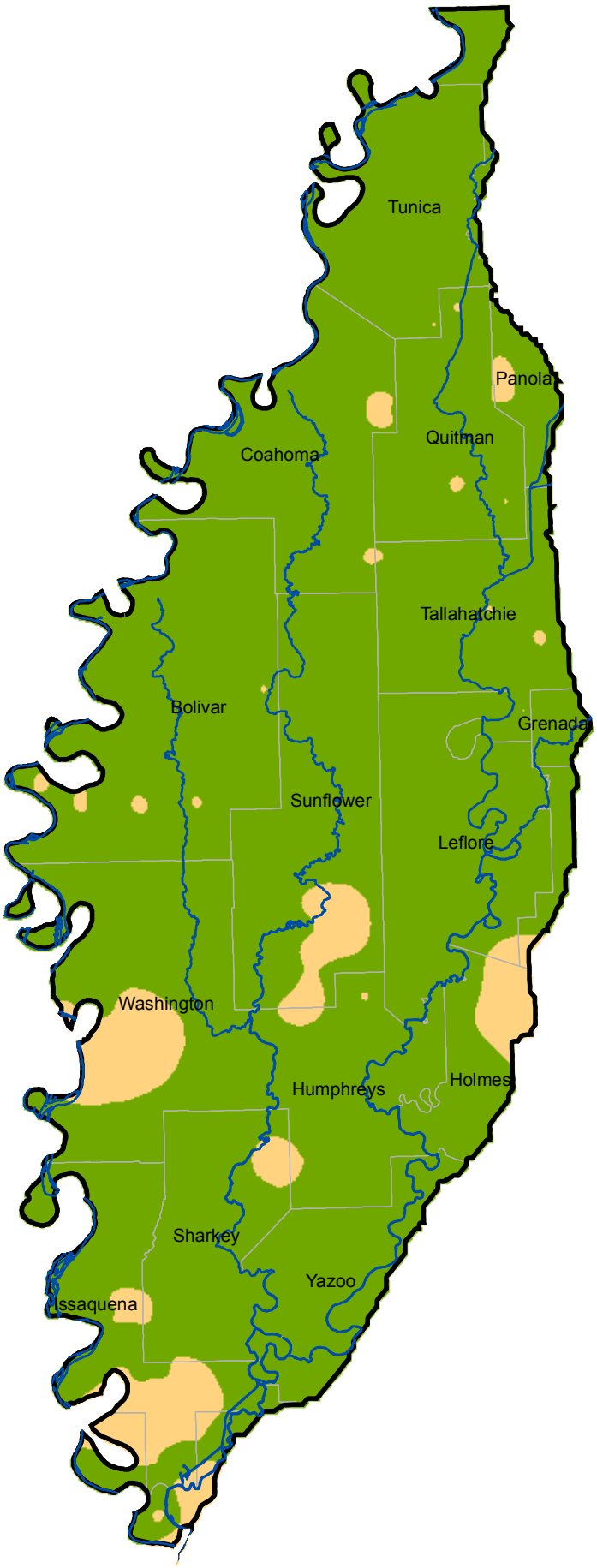


Table 2. Comparison of late January 2018 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for late January survey estimates.

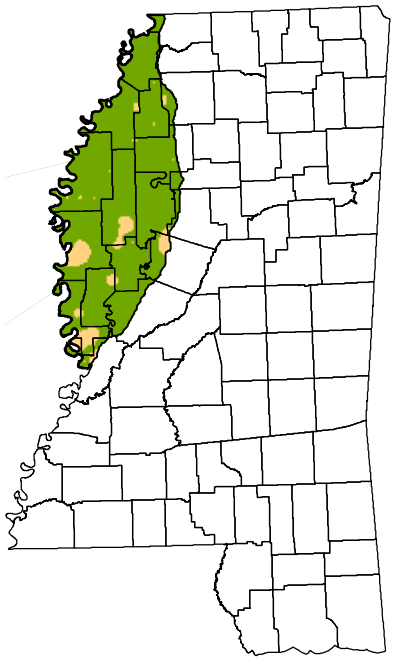
Species Group	Late Jan 2018	Late Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	334,140	235,104	+42.1%
Other Dabblers	516,240	383,934	+34.5%
Diving Ducks	45,587	135,603	-66.4%
Total Ducks	895,968	742,689	+20.6%

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta
Jan. 19, 24, & 25, 2018



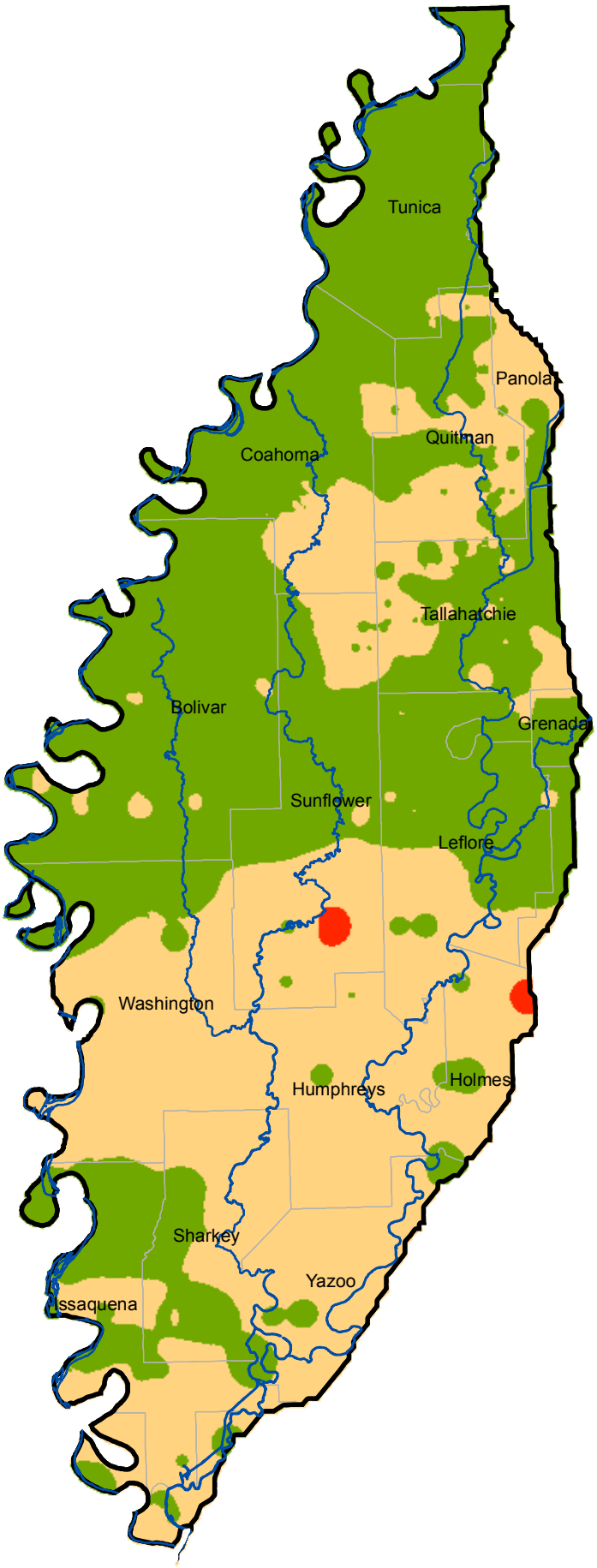
Description

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



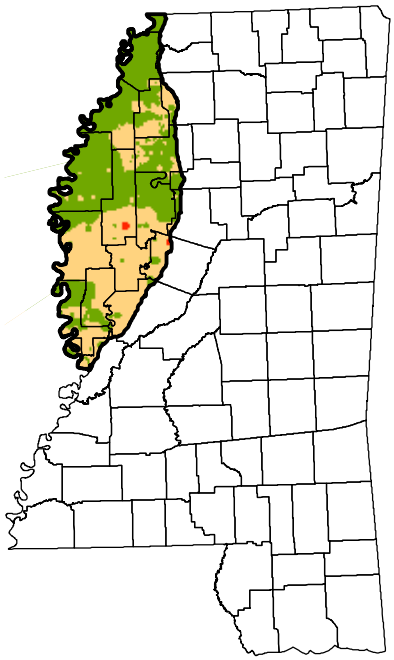
Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 29 Jan. 2018

Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta
Jan. 19, 24,& 25, 2018



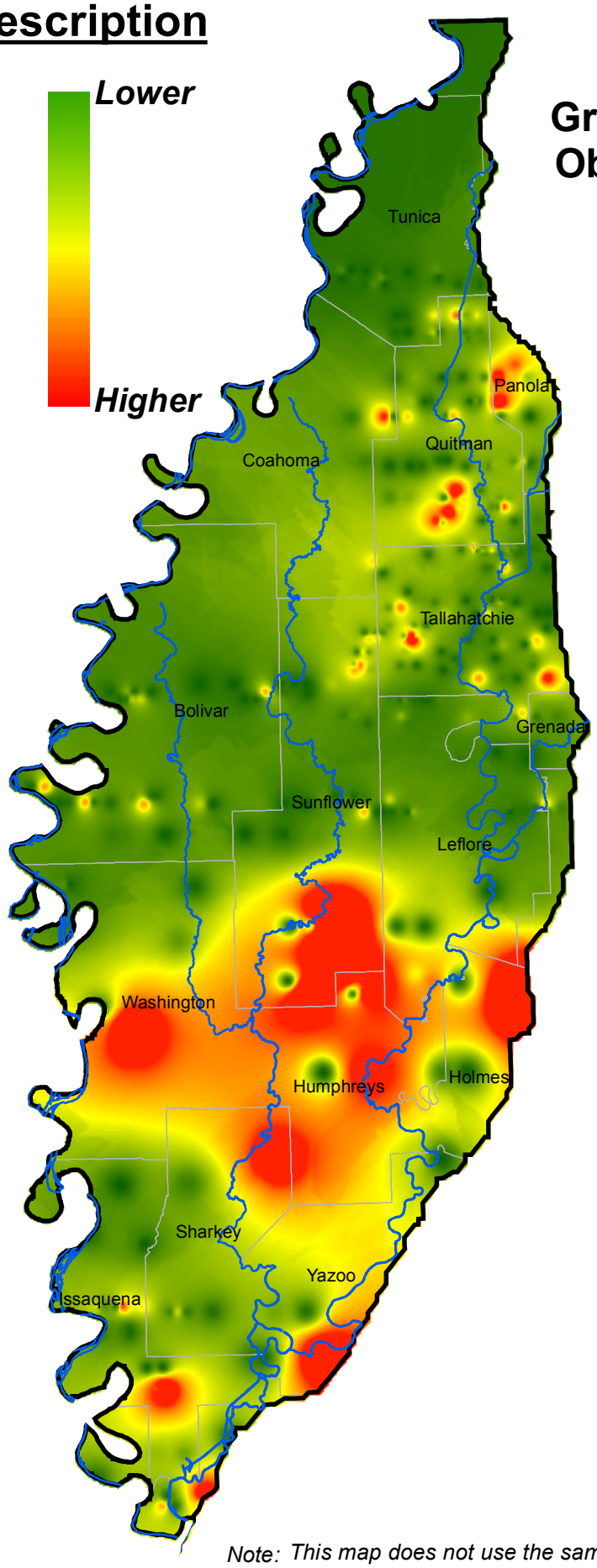
Description

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

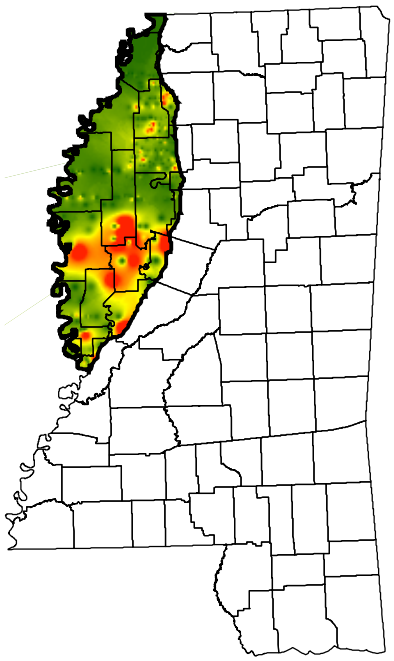


Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 29 Jan. 2018

Description



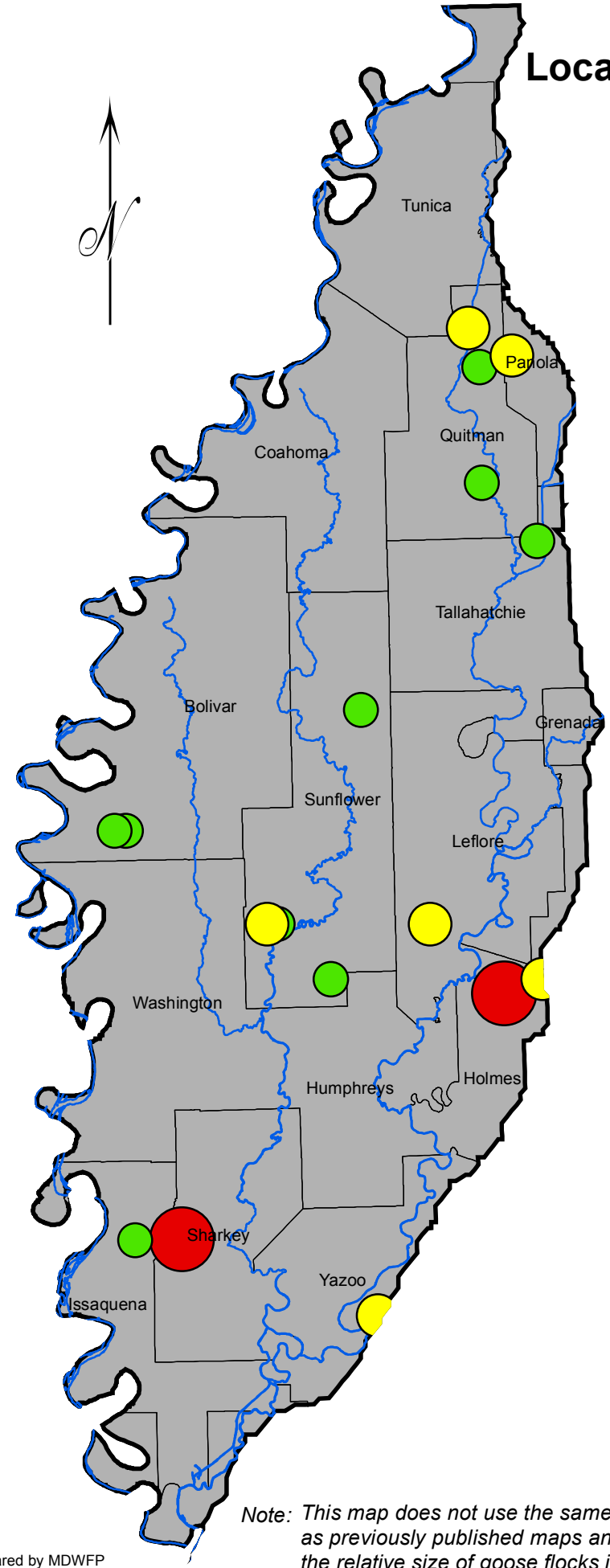
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 19, 24,& 25, 2018



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.

Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 29 Jan. 2018

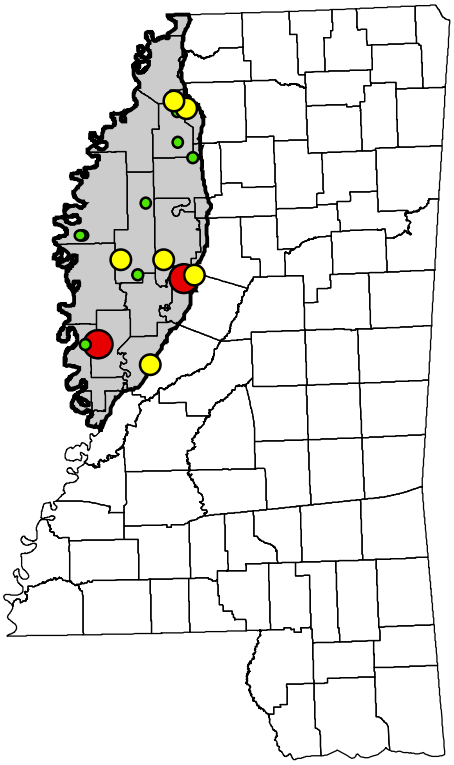
Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 19, 24,& 25, 2018



Description

Lower

Higher



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.

Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 29 Jan. 2018