MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 16 - 19, 2015

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The mid November MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred during November 16 – 19. Similar to 2014, and in contrast to many past November surveys, waterfowl habitat availability was high. Most of the Mississippi Delta received large amounts of rain during the week of the survey, causing natural flooding from runoff back-flowing out of ditches and other small drainages. However, a lack of actively managed water was still observed in most of the Mississippi Delta, especially the northwest and southern regions, meaning rain water was not held by water control structures in many areas. Also, an abundance of harvested agricultural fields have been disked as a result of a dry fall, resulting in less available food for waterfowl. Similar to recent years, flooded habitat generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast.

Overall, duck estimates were considerably lower than recent years' November estimates (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabbling ducks, diving ducks, and total ducks were all below the long-term average for November surveys (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards and diving ducks each comprised approximately 40% of all duck observations. Scaup and mallards were the two most abundant species observed, respectively. Duck numbers were very similar to estimates from November of 2010, which had a similar early winter weather pattern to 2015. However, the slow start to duck abundances in 2010-11 eventually peaked in late January with one of the highest duck estimates on record for Mississippi. Biologists remain optimistic that 2015-16 duck numbers can achieve a similar peak if weather events favorable for migration develop throughout the winter. A winter storm is currently sweeping across the upper Midwest and Great Lakes regions, and is expected to continue throughout the weekend. This storm could produce adequate low temperatures and snowfall to yield a southern migration of waterfowl down the Mississippi Flyway.

The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundance of ducks overall, as well as the greatest amount of managed flooded habitat across the landscape. Mallards were also more abundant in this region than other portions of the Delta. The northeastern region of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of dabbling ducks other than mallards and diving ducks, as well.

Most mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed using flooded agricultural fields and moist-soil habitat (natural vegetation, shallowly flooded) on intensively managed public and private lands. Most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes. Ducks were not spread out across newly flooded habitat, as expected, but were rather highly concentrated within large contiguous complexes of managed wetland habitat where abundance of food resources was likely high.

No large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross' geese) were observed during the November survey. Moderate numbers of greater white-fronted geese were observed using large flooded agricultural fields.

The first segment of the regular duck season will begin on November 27, 2015. For 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 November survey period, 2011-2015*. *Aerial surveys were not conducted during November of 2012 and 2013 due to inclement weather.

Species	Survey Period		
	Late November 2011	Late November 2014	Late November 2015
Mallards	43,845	88,005	30,933
Dabblers	183,823	229,810	57,702
Diving Ducks	80,928	79,400	54,167
Total Ducks	308,596	397,215	142,802

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late November survey period, 2011-2015*. *Aerial surveys were not conducted during November of 2012 and 2013 due to inclement weather.

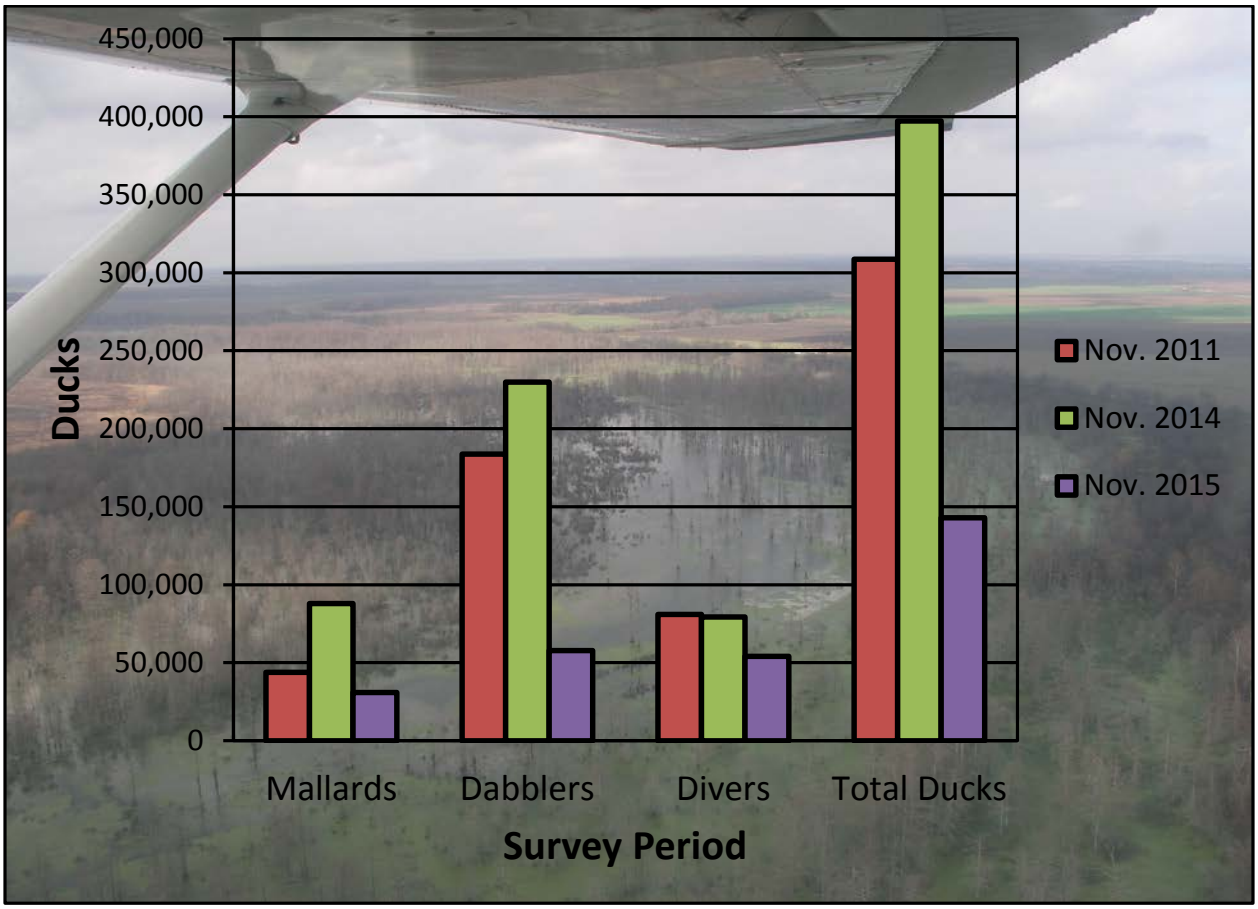
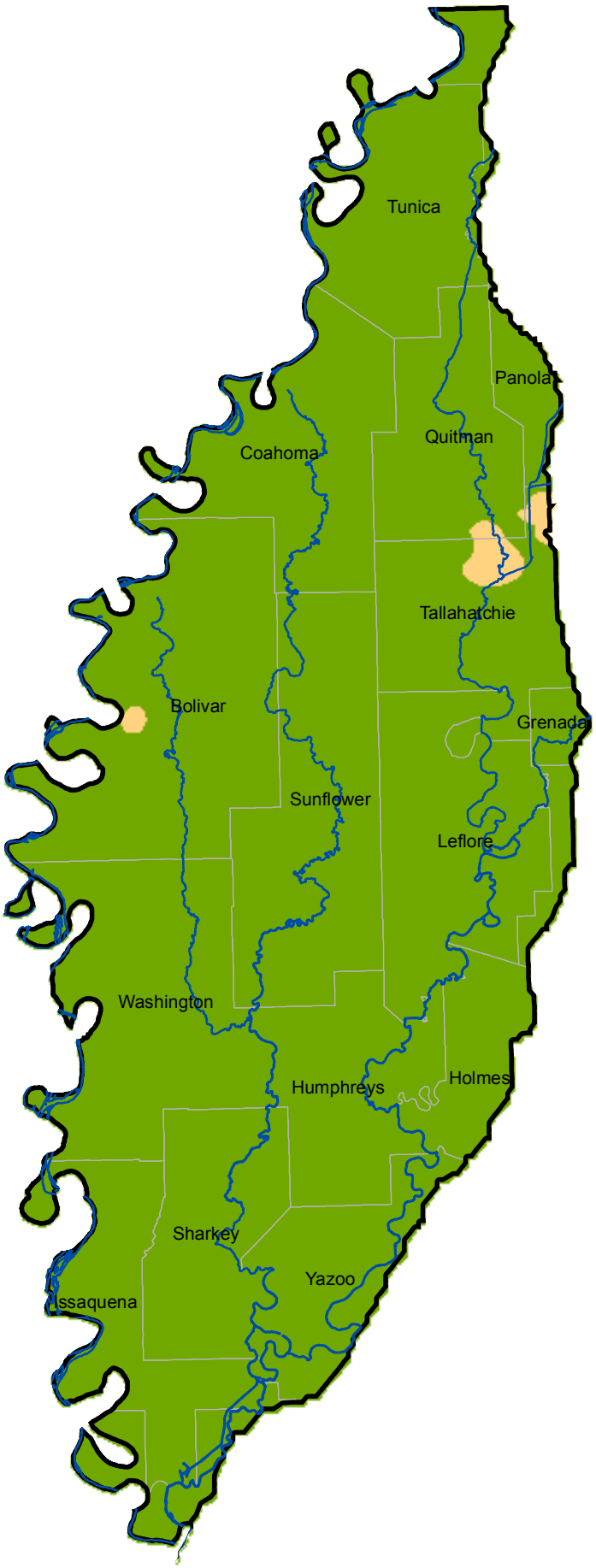


Table 2. Comparison of November 2015 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

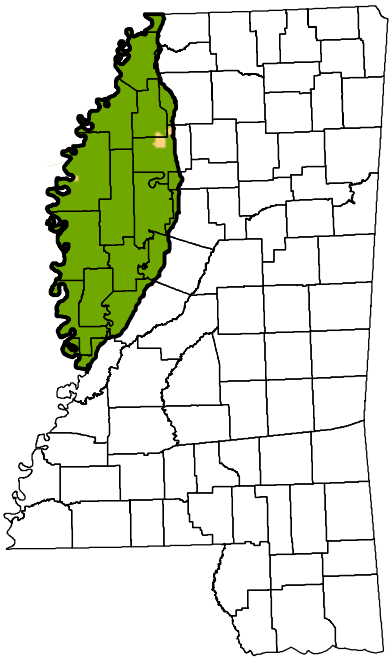
Species Group	November 2015	November LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	30,933	36,309	-15%
Dabblers	57,702	115,706	-50%
Diving Ducks	54,167	75,165	-28%
Total Ducks	142,802	227,180	-37%

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Nov.16 - 20, 2015



Description

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



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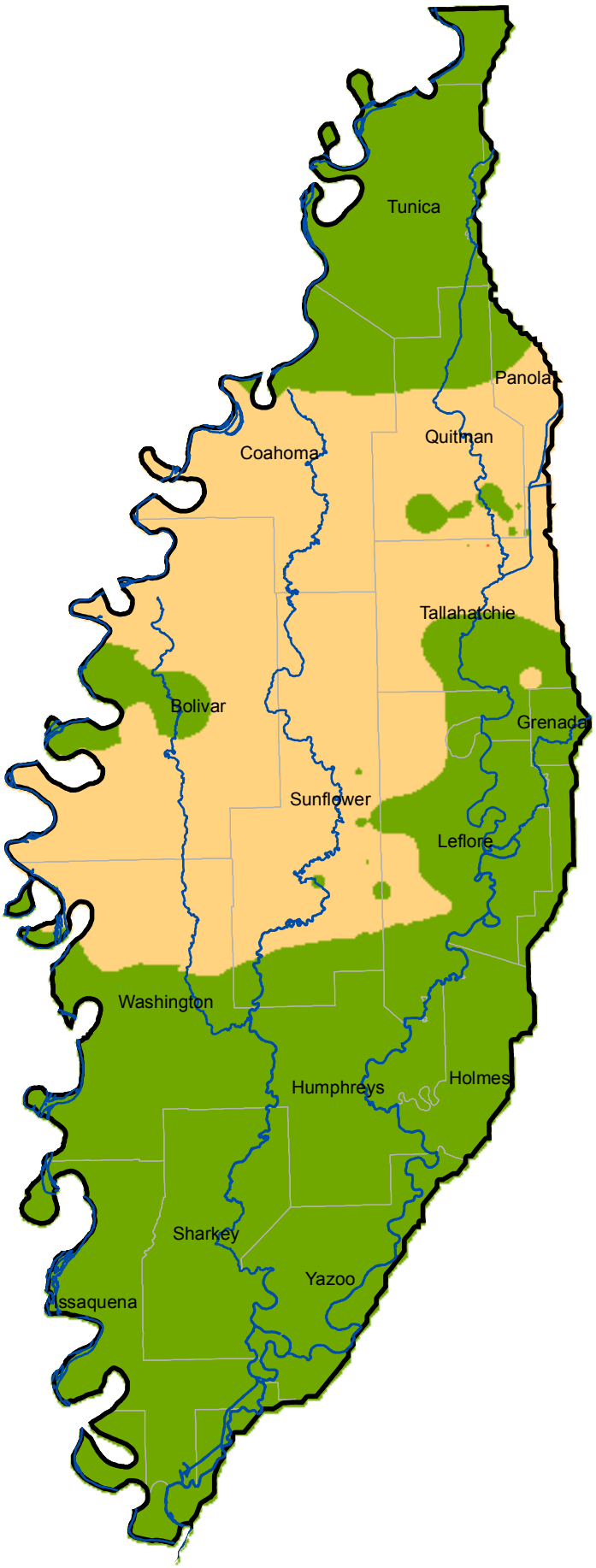
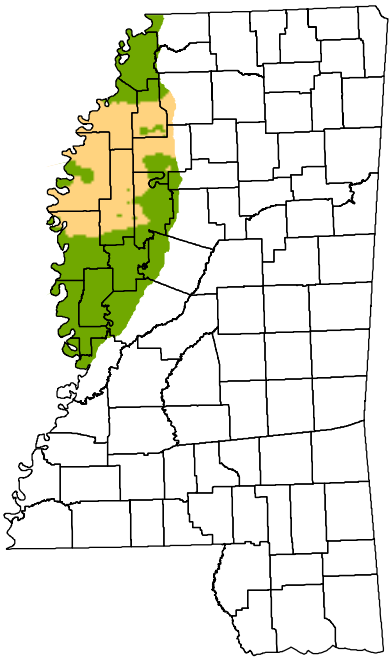
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Nov.16 - 20, 2015



Description

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



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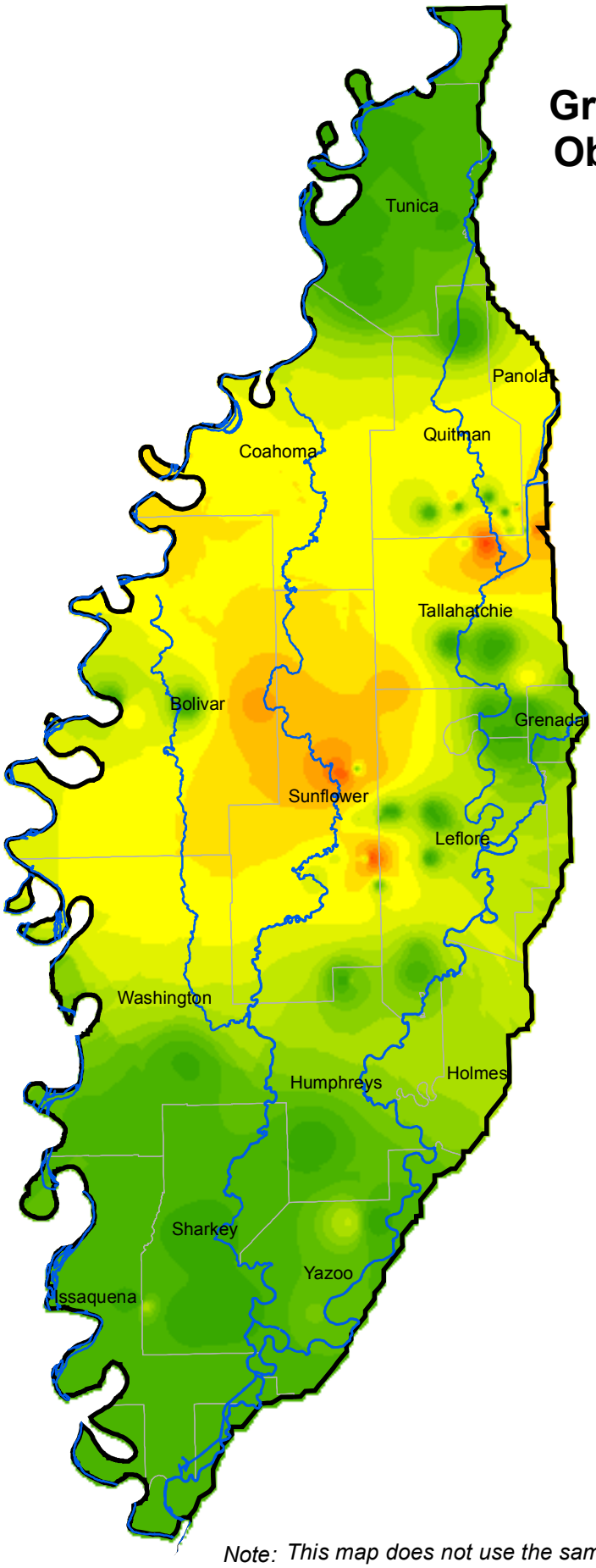
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 16 - 20, 2015



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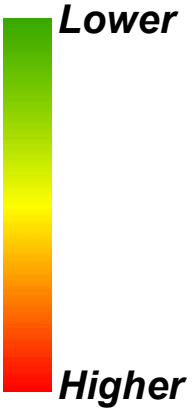

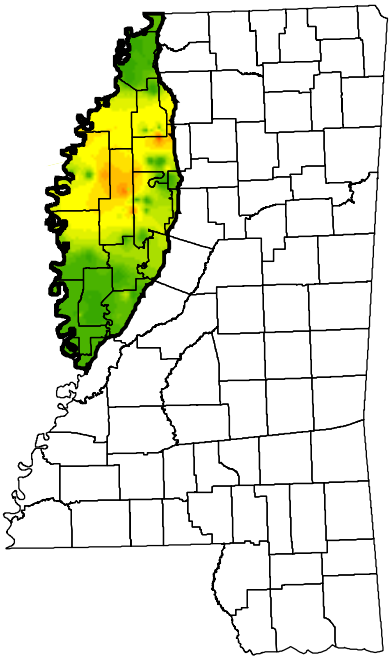

Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

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