



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 14 - 17, 2015



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The mid December MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred during December 14 – 17. Waterfowl habitat availability has remained relatively high across most of the Mississippi Delta, although observations of over-bank flooding from creeks and rivers were decreased from the November survey. A lack of actively managed wetland habitat, as well as an abundance of disked agricultural fields, were still observed in most of the Mississippi Delta, especially the northwest region. As usual, flooded habitat generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast.

Overall, duck estimates were somewhat lower than recent years' December 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 December surveys (Table 2), but estimates for all categories of ducks showed increases from the November survey, and all estimates moved closer to their long-term averages. Northern pintails and mallards showed the largest increases for all species from the November survey. Mallards and gadwall were the two most abundant species observed, respectively.

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

Most mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed using flooded agricultural fields, and compared to November, these ducks were more evenly distributed across abundant wetland habitat. Most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes and permanent wetlands such as large oxbow lakes. An increase in migrant light geese (snow, blue, and Ross' geese), as well as greater white-fronted geese, was observed during the December survey. Geese were observed using both flooded and dry agricultural fields.

A welcomed cold front is expected to move into the southern United States over the weekend, with overnight low temperatures reaching the freezing mark. This weather could potentially cause a small southerly migration of waterfowl. However, the front is predicted to be of short duration, followed by rainfall and daily high temperatures returning to the mid to upper 70s by next week.

The next aerial waterfowl survey is scheduled to begin the week of January 4, 2016. Hunters are reminded that weather not only greatly impacts migration of birds into the state, but it also influences daily movements of the birds which are already present. The warm conditions experienced over the past few weeks have not required birds to feed as heavily as if it were cold. These conditions can influence habitat use as well. For more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey period, 2013-2015.

Species	Survey Period		
	December 2013	December 2014	December 2015
Mallards	230,634	86,838	139,805
Dabblers	638,386	331,460	193,719
Diving Ducks	100,412	102,117	90,958
Total Ducks	969,432	520,415	424,482

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey period, 2013-2015.

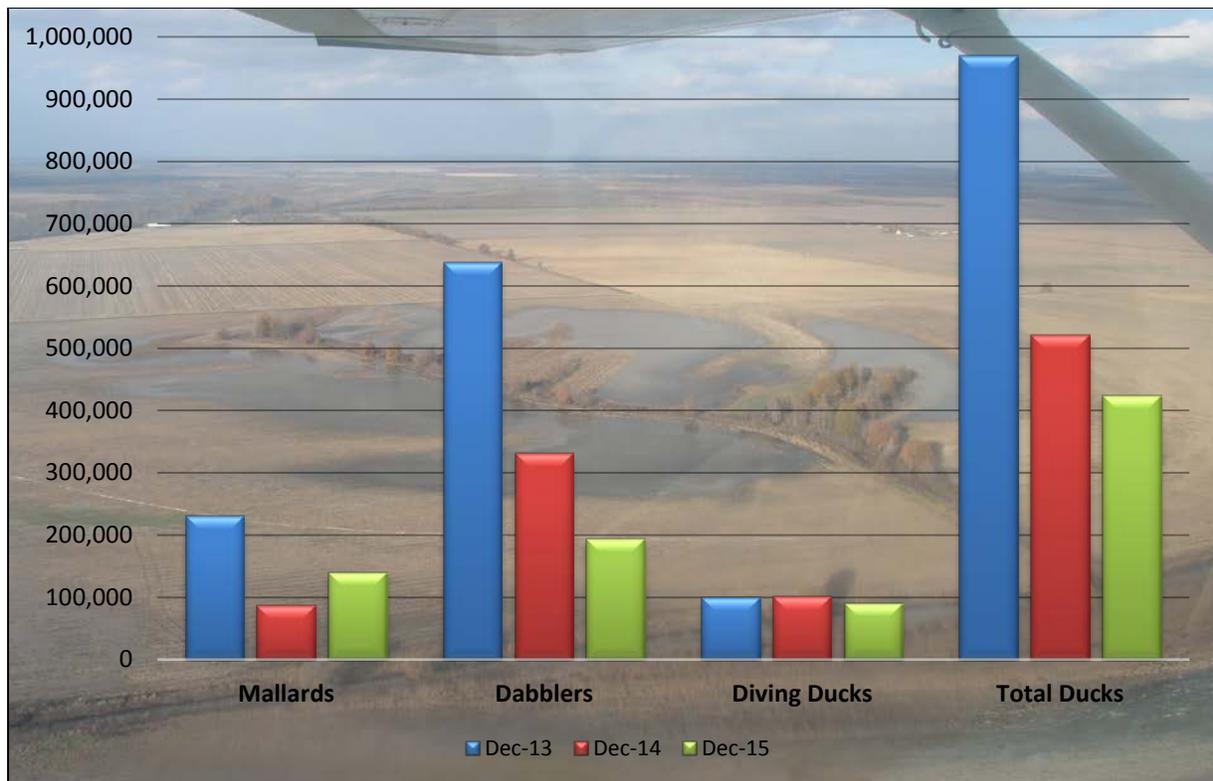
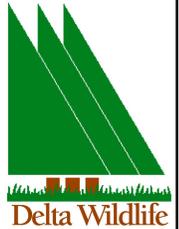
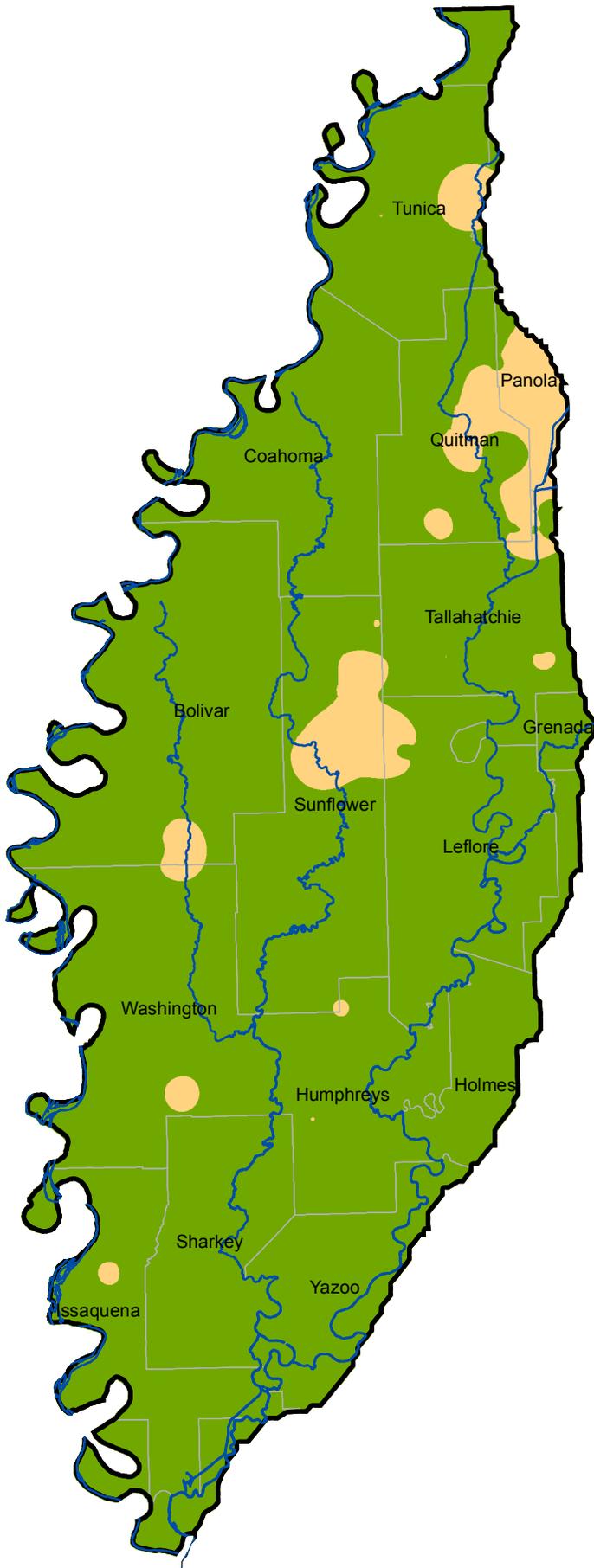


Table 2. Comparison of December 2015 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for December survey estimates.

Species Group	December 2015	December LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	139,805	146,495	-5%
Dabblers	193,719	298,336	-36%
Diving Ducks	90,958	111,145	-28%
Total Ducks	424,482	555,976	-24%

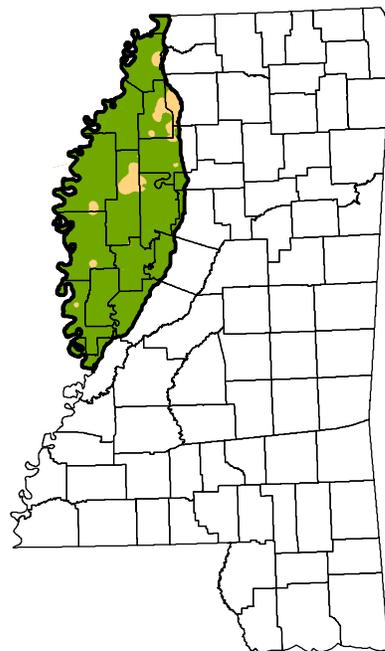
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 14-17, 2015



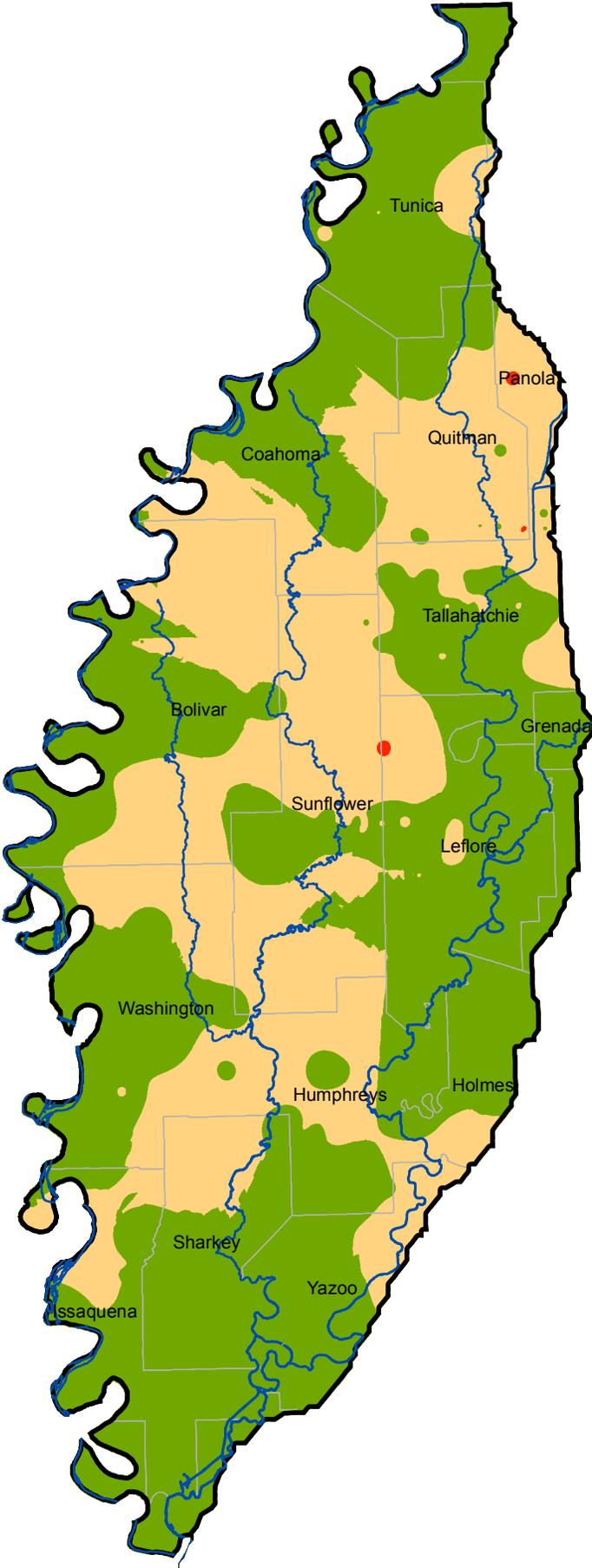
Description

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



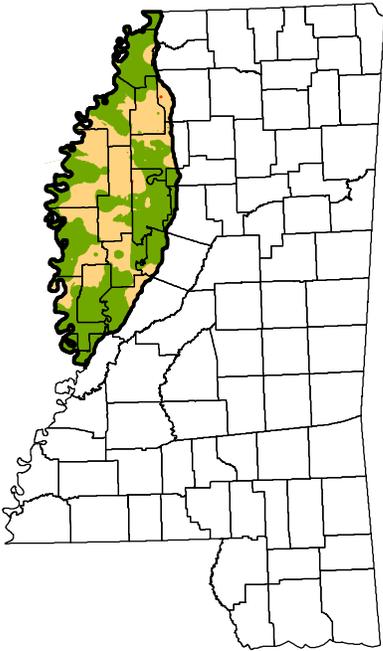
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 14-17, 2015

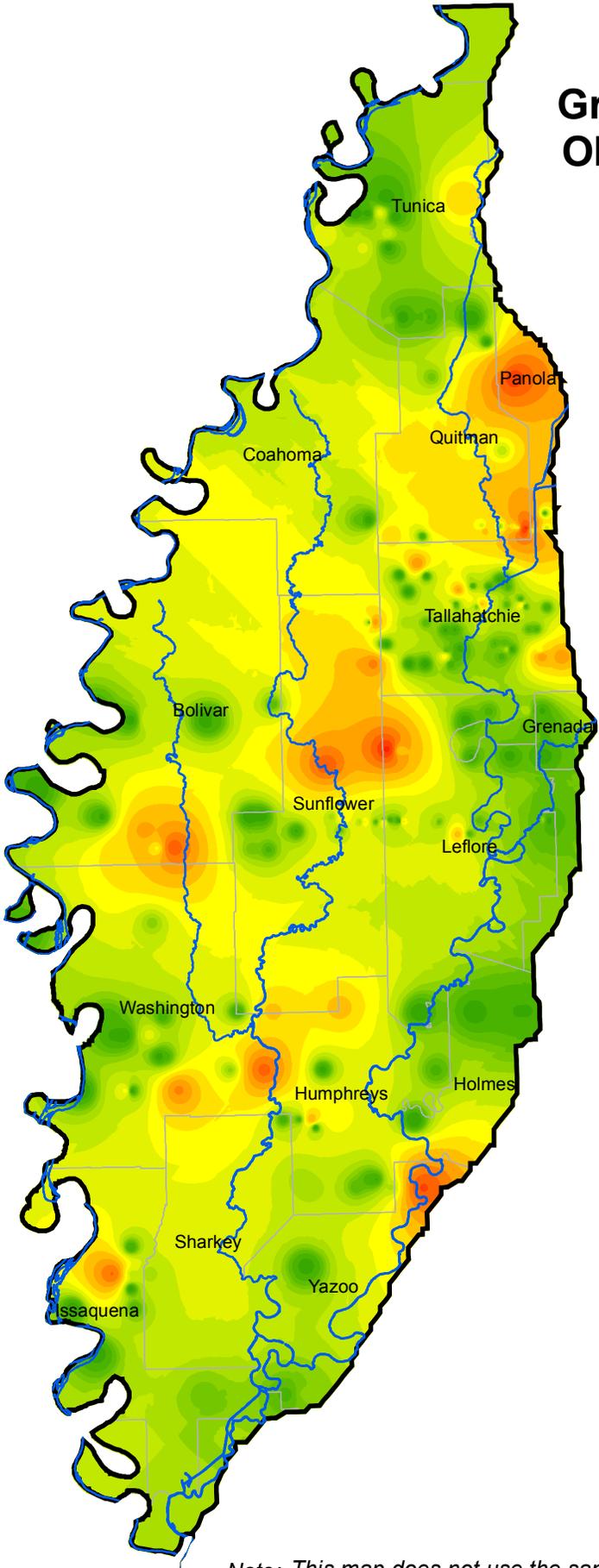


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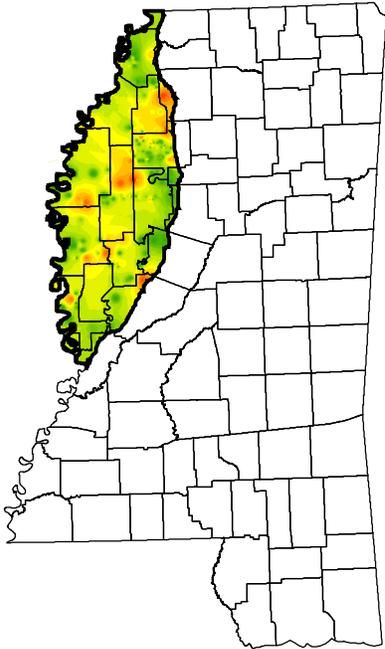
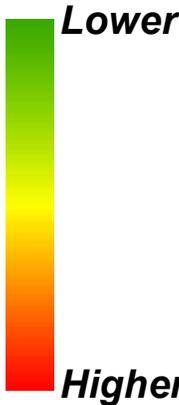
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
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Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 14-17, 2015



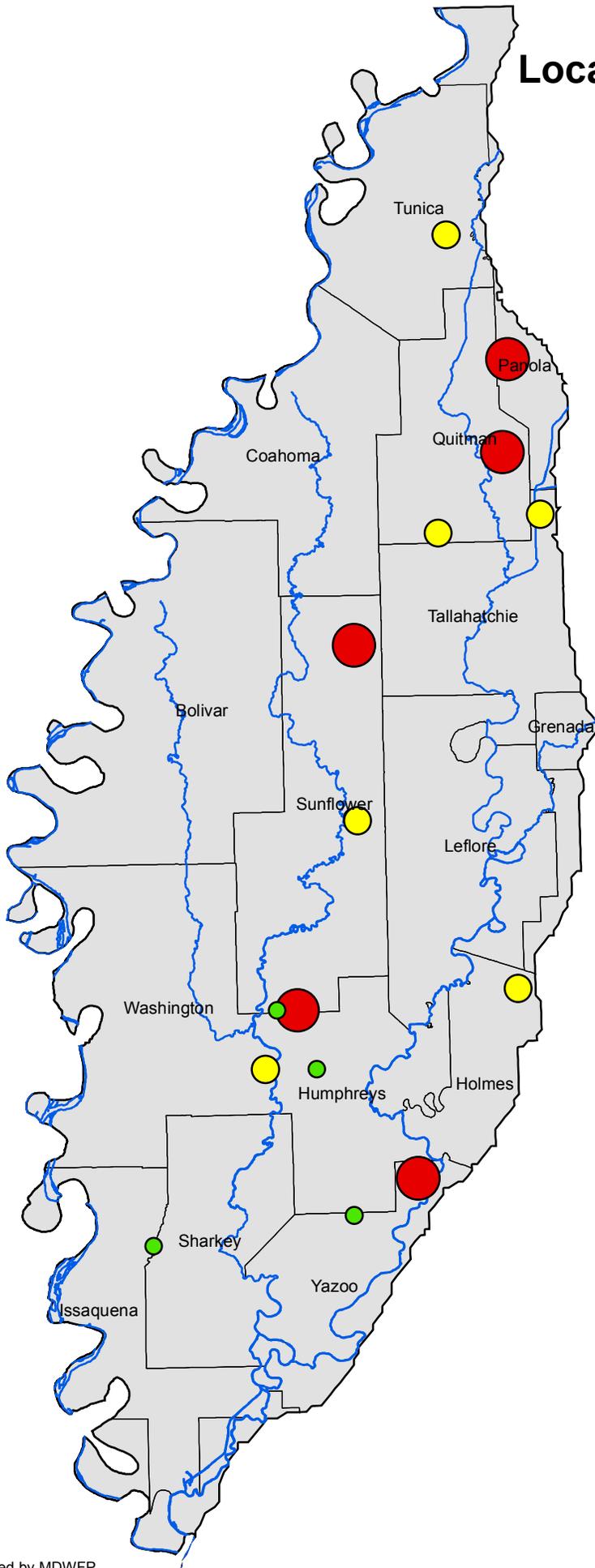
Description



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. 14 - 17, 2015



Description

