



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 14 - 16, 2016



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The mid-November MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred during November 14 – 16. In contrast to November 2015, waterfowl habitat availability was extremely low across the Mississippi Delta region of the state. As expected, given the drought conditions across the state, artificially pumped water was rarely observed in most of the Mississippi Delta. Public lands held 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 as a result of an extremely dry fall, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl if fields are eventually flooded. As in most years, flooded habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast.

Despite relatively warm weather and extremely dry conditions, duck abundance estimates were considerably higher than last November's estimates (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabbling ducks, diving ducks, and total ducks were also higher than or similar to the long term averages for November surveys (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards comprised over 60% of all duck observations. Gadwalls and northern shovelers were the two most abundant species observed overall. Ruddy ducks, ring-necked ducks, and scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. With the regular waterfowl hunting season set to open November 25, MDWFP biologists are optimistic that Wildlife Management Areas will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for a good start to the season. A winter storm is currently moving across the upper Midwest and Great Lakes regions. This storm could produce sustained low temperatures and enough snowfall to yield a southern migration of waterfowl down portions of the Mississippi Flyway.

The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundance of ducks overall, followed closely by the northwestern and southeastern regions. Mallards were most abundant in the southeastern region. The greatest abundances of dabbling ducks other than mallards were observed in the northeastern region of the Delta, and the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the northwestern region.

Most mallards were observed using flooded moist-soil habitat (natural vegetation, shallowly flooded) on intensively managed public and private lands, followed by flooded agricultural lands. Most dabbling ducks other than mallards, as well as diving ducks were observed heavily using permanent wetlands such as oxbow lakes and sloughs. However, many permanent water areas are currently holding much less water than normal, and shallow water depths in these habitats may be affecting the attractiveness of these otherwise lightly-used areas. Permanent wetlands are also typically more remote areas which experience less disturbance from human activity.

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 and levees around aquaculture facilities.

The first segment of the regular duck season will begin on November 25, 2016. 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 November survey period, 2014-2016.

Species	Survey Period		
	November 2014	November 2015	November 2016
Mallards	88,005	30,933	36,540
Other Dabblers	229,810	57,702	212,469
Diving Ducks	79,400	54,167	124,240
Total Ducks	397,215	142,802	373,249

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the November survey period, 2014-2016.

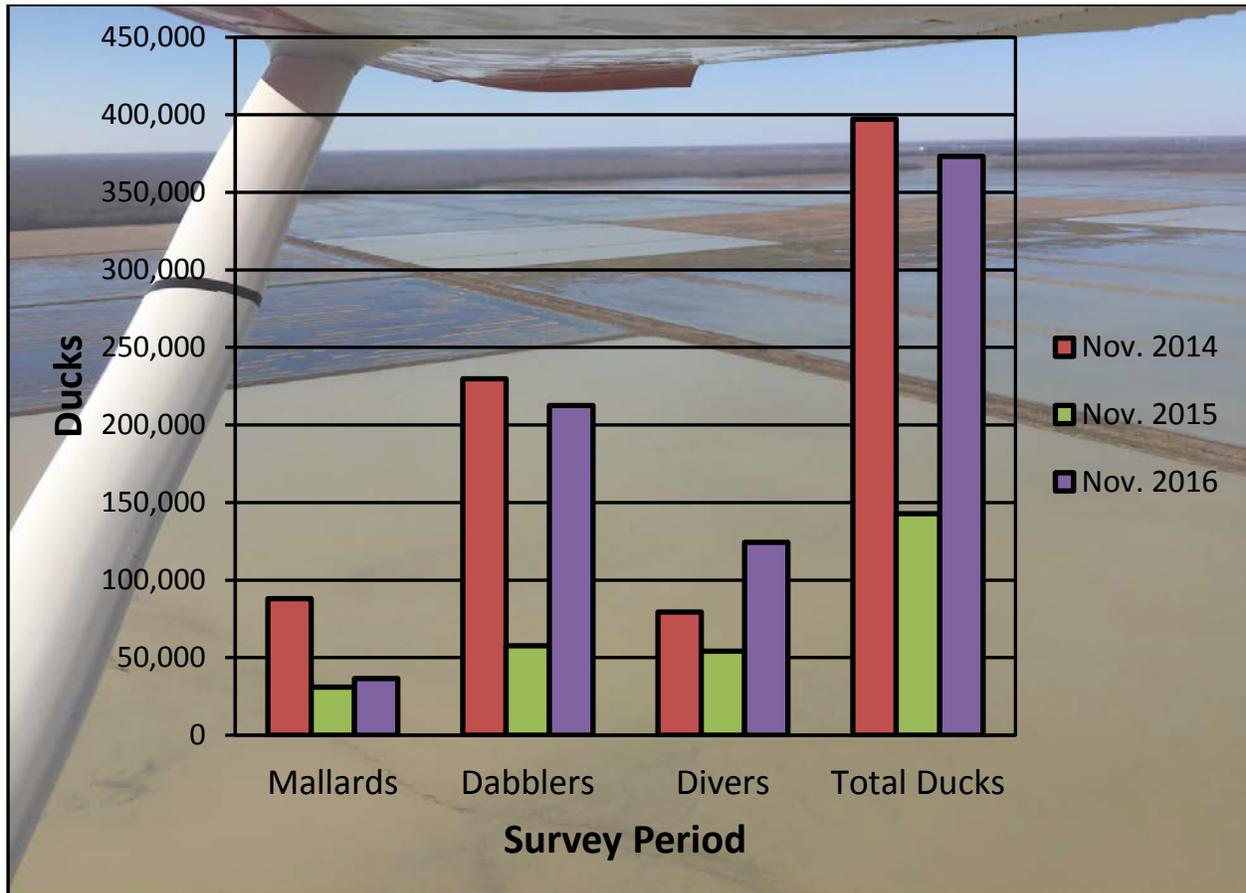


Table 2. Comparison of November 2016 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

Species Group	November 2016	November LTA	% Change from Nov LTA
Mallards	36,540	36,388	+0.6%
Other Dabblers	212,469	127,801	+66.2%
Diving Ducks	124,240	81,299	+52.8%
Total Ducks	373,249	245,439	+52.1%

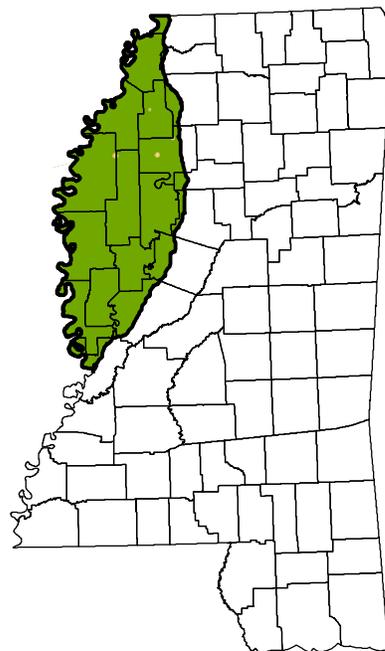
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Nov.14 - 16, 2016



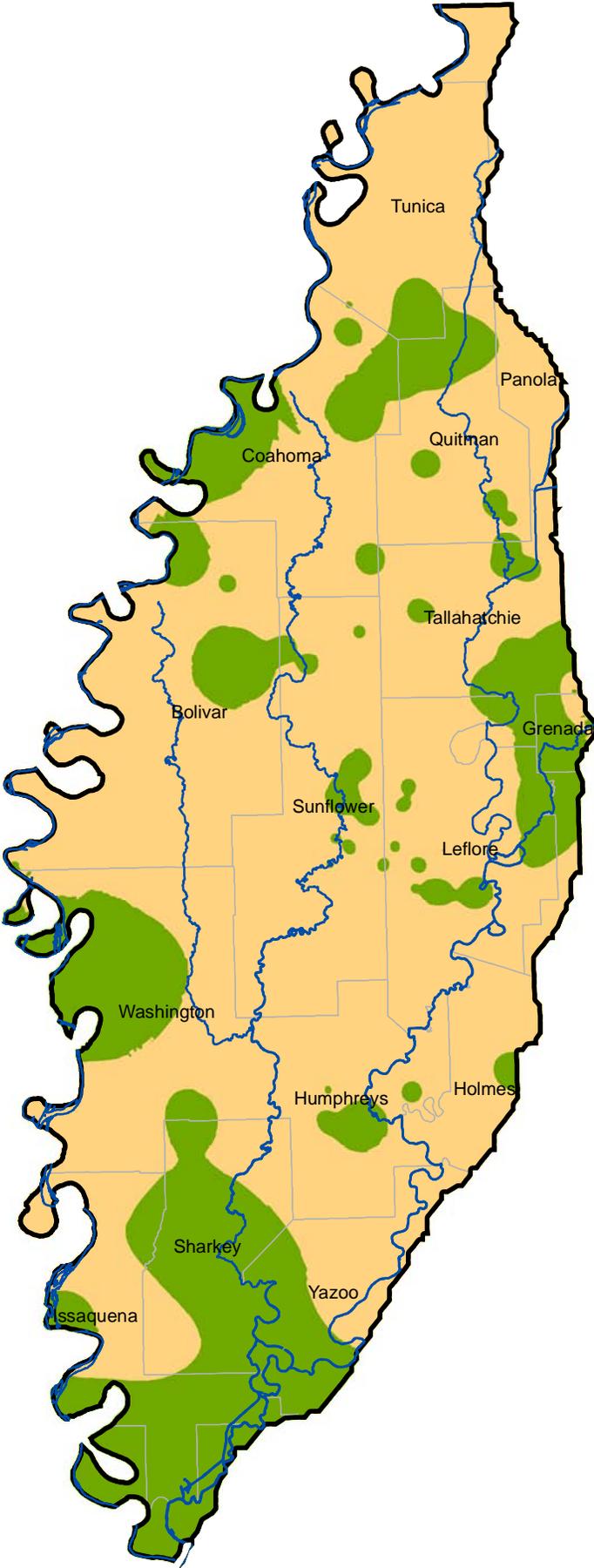
Description

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



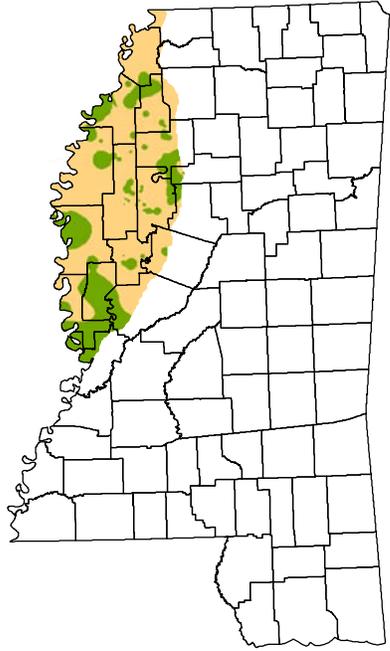
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Nov.14 - 16, 2016

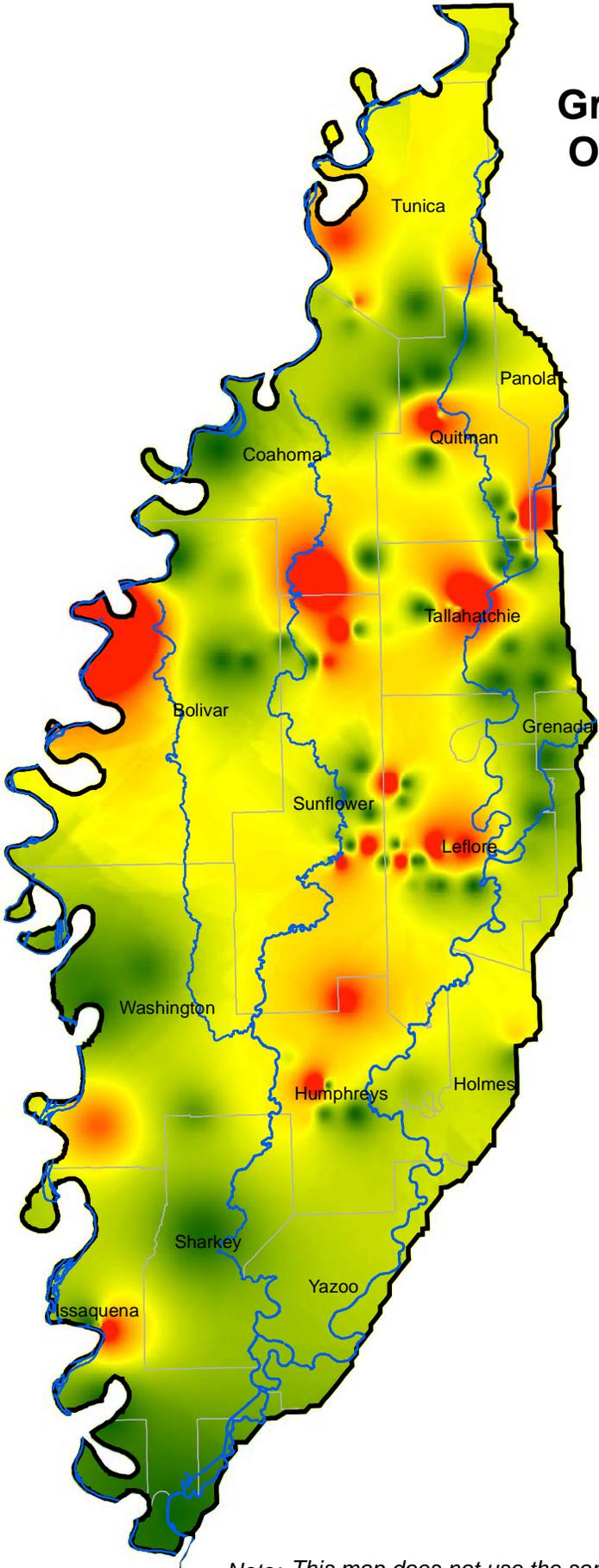


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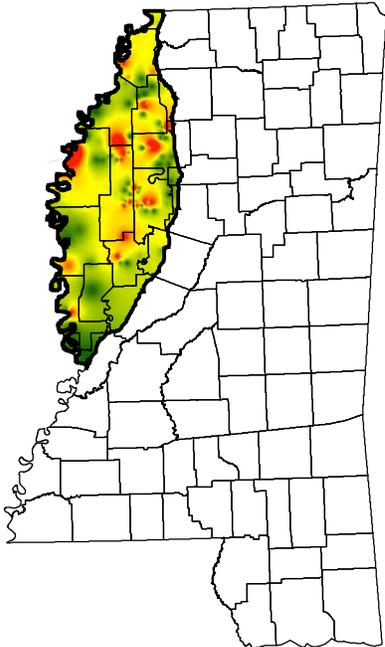
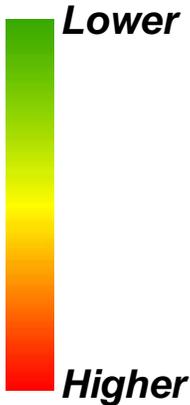
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 14 - 16, 2016



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.

