



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 13 - 18, 2018



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

Prepared by:
Houston Havens
Waterfowl Program Coordinator
MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
601-432-2199
Houston.Havens@wfp.ms.gov

The first MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred November 13 – 18, 2018. Wetland habitat availability appeared to be well above average for November survey due to recent rainfall and a generally wet start to the fall. However, abundant opportunity remains for private landowners to capture rainfall with water control structures as fall and winter continue. As in most years, number of managed, flooded impoundments generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Mississippi Delta. In contrast to recent years and likely because of wet conditions, many harvested agricultural fields observed had not been disked, which may benefit waterfowl this winter if they become flooded. Water levels were relatively high in most drainages, creeks, and rivers, but “natural” over-bank flooding was observed in very few areas. Significant backwater flooding was observed in the lower Yazoo backwater area along Steele Bayou.

Duck abundance estimates were generally lower than recent years’ November estimates (Table 1 and Figure 1). However, estimates for mallards were higher than the long-term average for November surveys. Other dabbler, diver, and total duck estimates were lower than their long-term averages for November (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 50% of all duck observations, which is typical for this time of year in Mississippi. Mallards and northern shovelers were the two most abundant species observed overall. Scaup, ring-necked ducks, and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. With the regular waterfowl hunting season set to open November 23, MDWFP biologists are optimistic that Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for a great start to the season. Youth hunters got their first chance at duck hunting for the year on Saturday, November 17 and many WMAs offered quality hunting opportunities with several youth hunters harvesting their first ducks. Temperatures are currently forecasted to increase later this week, with significant chances of rainfall on opening day. However, the extended forecast shows cooler temperatures resuming by early next week. Weather severity index models for waterfowl migration predict that conditions will cause mallards to continue moving south out of the Great Lakes region, while other species of dabbling ducks are predicted to significantly increase in southern states.

The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of mallards, other dabblers, and total ducks overall. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the southeastern region.

As expected, mallards and other dabblers were observed most commonly using flooded areas of agricultural fields. Ducks were commonly observed in large complexes with multiple flooded fields. In general, ducks were not evenly distributed across the relatively large amount of available wetland habitat. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups, which is typical of early-season behavior. Biologists speculate that ducks will soon begin to distribute further as they find additional wetlands with lower competition for food. Very few large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’) and greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey.

WMA waterfowl draw hunt applications are now open for the second draw period of the season. Applications can be submitted at

<https://xnet2.mdwfp.com/drawings/public/WmaDrawingsV3.aspx>. 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 November survey periods, 2007-2018.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2007-08	25,872	34,241	27,992	88,106
2008-09	30,748	96,245	105,089	232,081
2009-10	24,281	137,996	77,839	240,117
2010-11	10,481	70,123	100,740	181,344
2011-12	43,845	183,823	80,928	308,596
2012-13	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
2013-14	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
2014-15	88,005	229,810	79,400	397,215
2015-16	30,933	57,702	54,167	142,802
2016-17	36,540	212,469	124,240	373,249
2017-18	88,019	303,472	109,101	500,591
2018-19	55,258	103,181	55,932	214,371
Average	43,398	142,906	81,543	267,847

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the five most recent November survey periods.

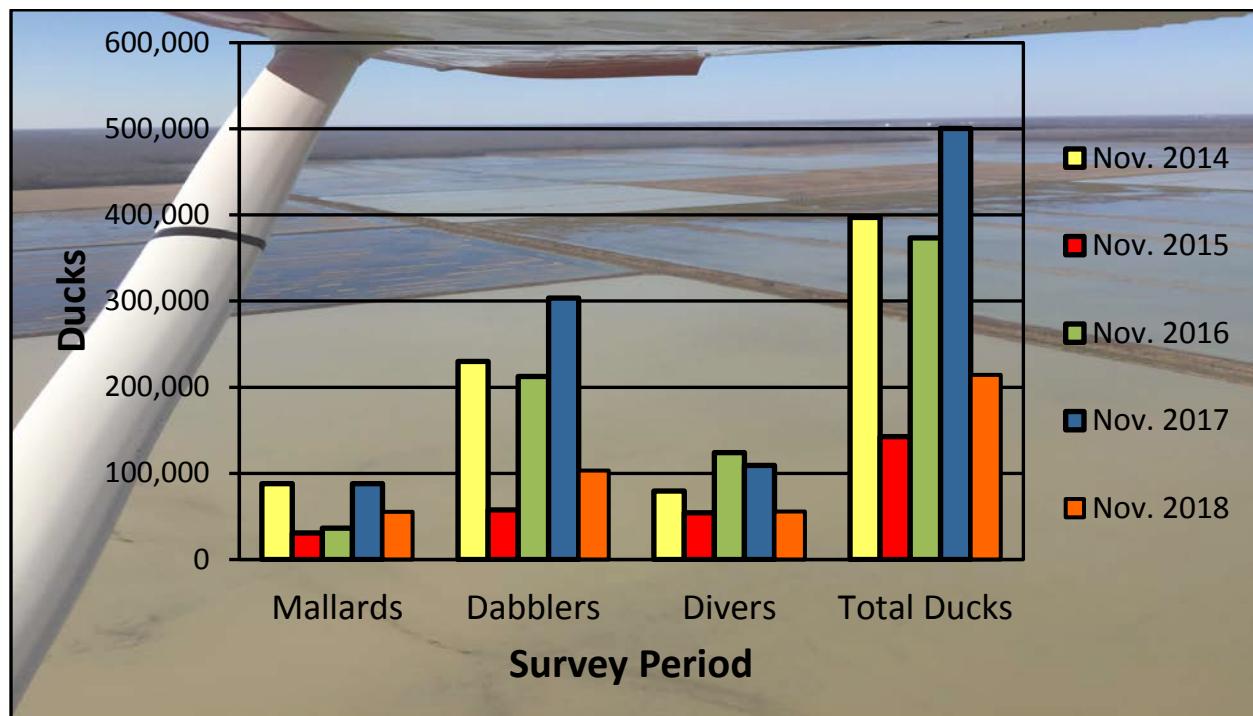


Table 2. Comparison of November 2018 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

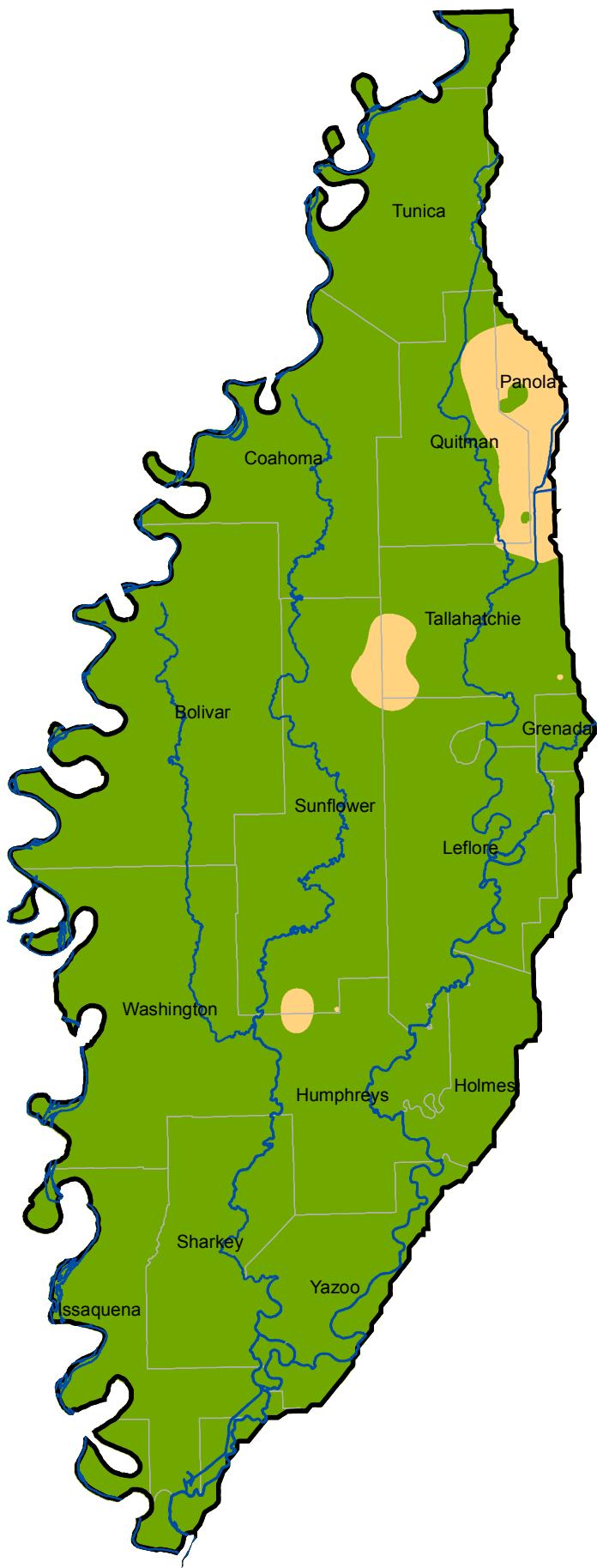
Species Group	November 2018	November LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	55,258	43,398	+27.3%
Other Dabblers	103,181	142,906	-27.8%
Diving Ducks	55,932	81,543	-31.4%
Total Ducks	214,371	267,847	-20.0%

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 13-17, 2018

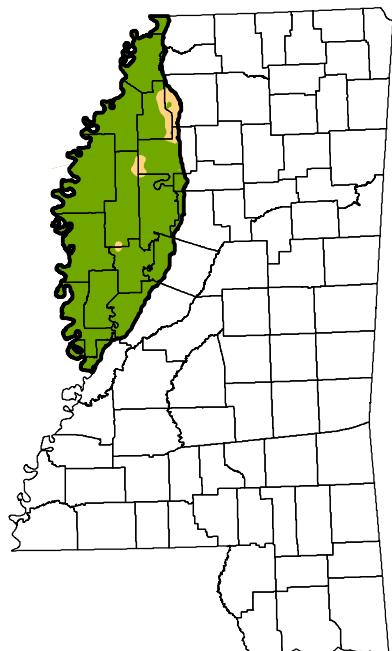


Delta Wildlife



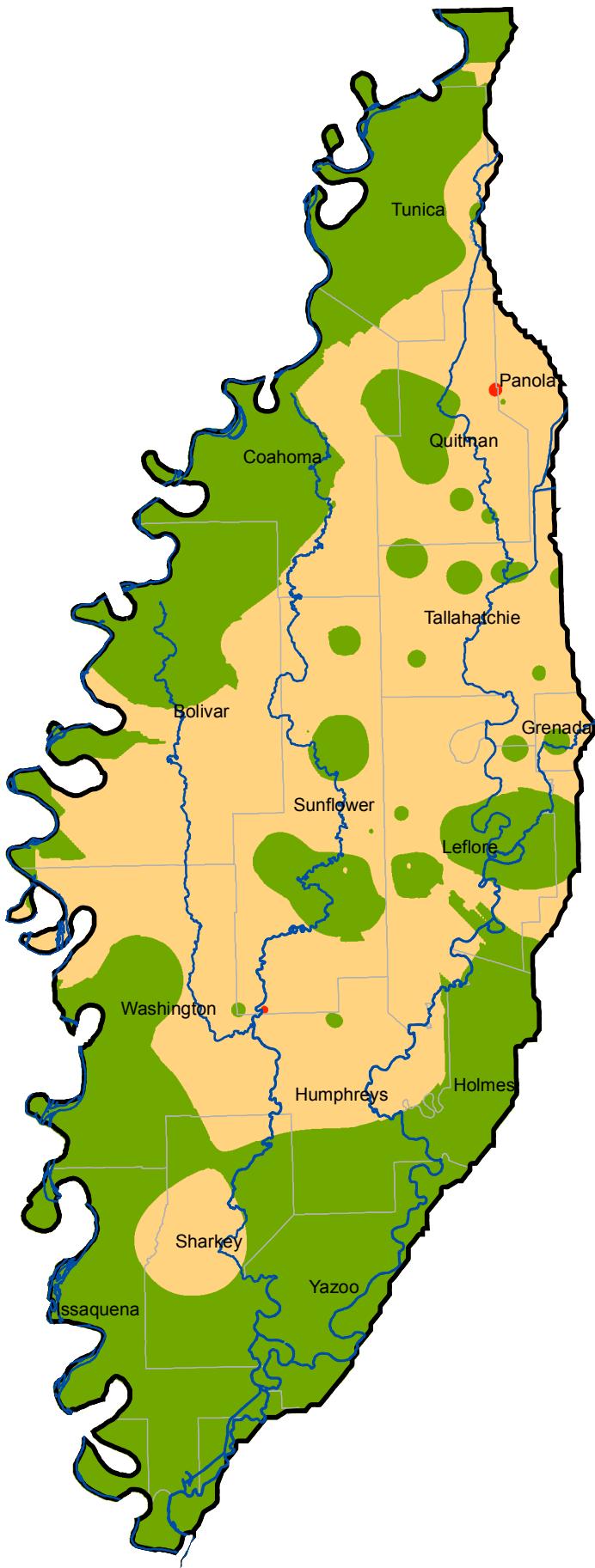
Description

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



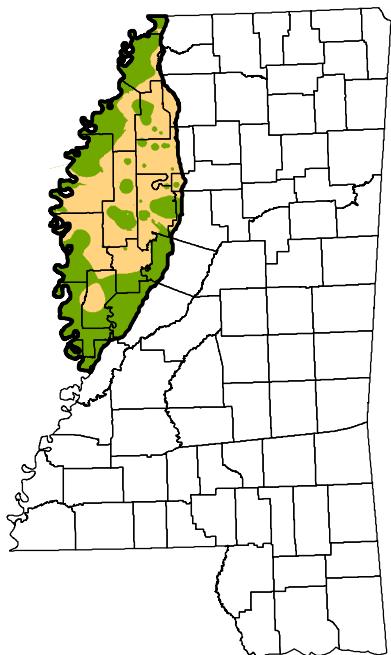
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 13-17, 2018

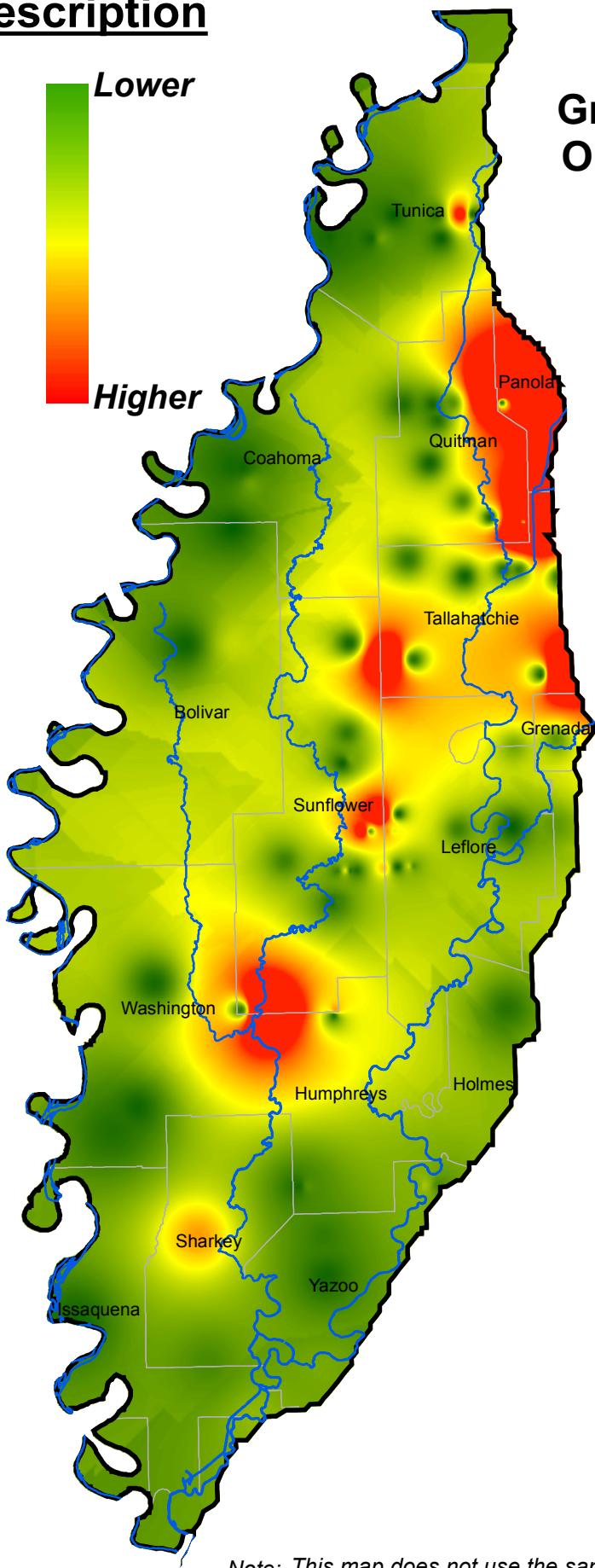


Description

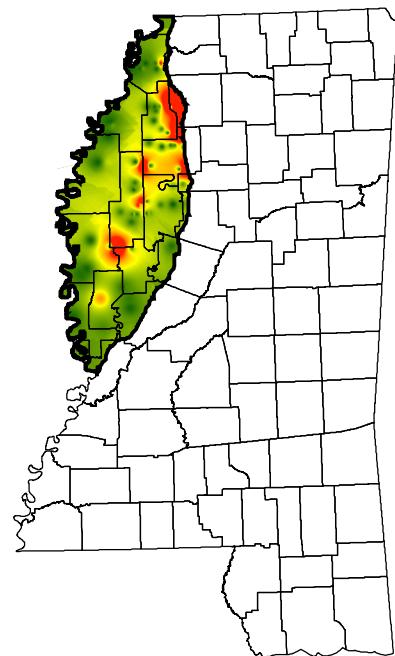
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



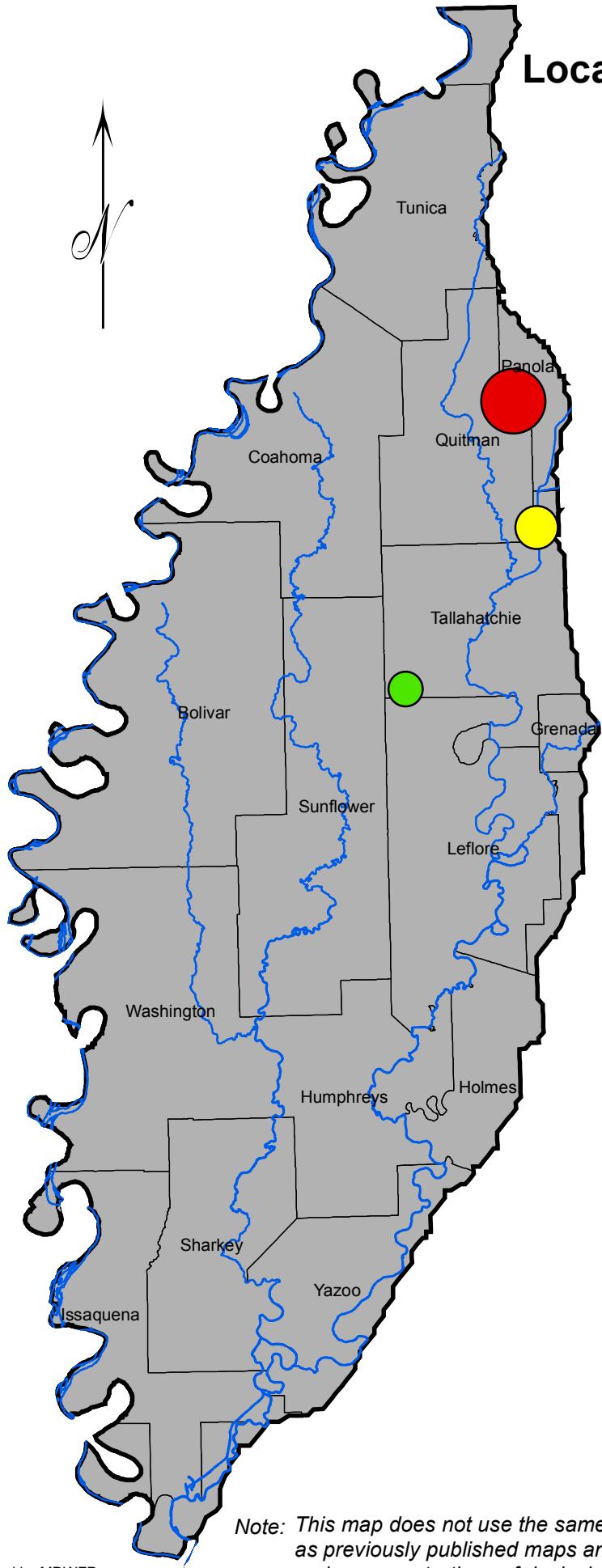
Description



**Greatest Concentrations of Ducks
Observed in the Mississippi Delta
Nov. 13-17, 2018**



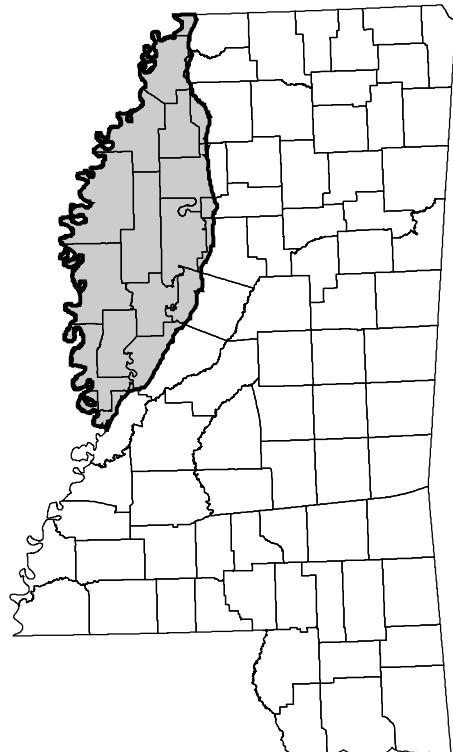
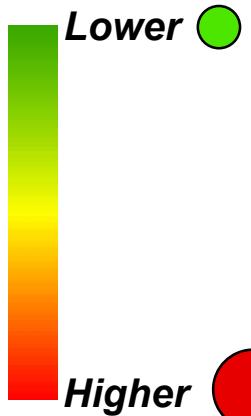
*Note: This map does not use the same area calculations
as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate
major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.*



Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 13-17, 2018



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.*