



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 17 - 23, 2023



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The fourth and final MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season was flown January 17 – 23, 2023. Wetland habitat availability increased slightly from the early January survey, but the Mississippi River and interior Delta river systems have remained below their flood stages and very little overbank flooding has occurred across the state this season. As usual, wetland habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Delta region, where multiple landowners and nearby public lands intensively manage a significant number of wetland acres.

Estimates for mallards and other dabbling ducks increased significantly from their early January estimates. However, estimates for mallards, other dabbling ducks, diving ducks, and total ducks all remained below their respective long-term averages for late January (Tables 1 and 2). It is worth noting that random flight transects did not intersect many aquaculture facilities for this survey, which caused diving duck estimates to be very low (and therefore impacted the total duck estimate). Mallards and other dabblers made up about 95% of all duck observations, while diving duck estimates declined after peaking in early January. Mallards were by far the most abundant species observed, followed by gadwall and northern shovelers. Scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed, but a noteworthy number of canvasbacks were also counted during this survey. The northeastern portion of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards, other dabbling ducks, and total ducks overall while the southeastern portion held the greatest numbers of diving ducks.

Mallards and other dabblers were once again most observed using flooded agriculture fields, but an increase in duck use of forested wetlands was also observed, which is common for late January. As usual, most diving ducks were observed using aquaculture ponds and deep, permanent water bodies. In agricultural fields, ducks were commonly observed in large complexes with multiple flooded fields. Contrasting to the previous surveys, ducks were more evenly distributed across available wetland habitat, which is typical of late-season behavior. Observations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) remained high, and were more evenly distributed north to south across the Delta than in previous surveys.

The final week of Mississippi's regular waterfowl hunting season has arrived, with the final day coming on Tuesday, January 31. However, hunters are reminded to take advantage of the additional waterfowling opportunities for youth, veterans, and active military personnel February 4 – 5. Abundant hunting opportunities also remain during the light goose conservation order February 1 – 3 and February 6 – March 31. Local weather conditions are predicted to be a bit warm and rainy to wrap up the regular season.

For more information on waterfowl and wetland habitat, visit the MDWFP Waterfowl Program website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey periods, 2008-2023.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2008	110,476	182,869	70,396	363,741
2009	262,235	318,638	232,878	740,591
2010	234,937	333,240	112,167	680,344
2011	247,913	454,578	215,821	918,313
2012	278,205	436,996	199,926	915,127
2013	146,782	273,905	83,119	503,806
2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015	162,098	356,993	82,733	596,092
2016	307,177	482,843	206,983	997,003
2017	267,078	483,037	106,419	815,903
2018	334,140	516,240	45,587	895,968
2019	151,742	309,696	74,525	532,413
2020	252,276	507,754	106,770	839,005
2021	183,868	209,731	44,407	438,006
2022	138,551	222,967	99,631	461,149
2023	182,649	307,643	25,942	516,153
Average	217,342	359,809	113,820	680,908

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

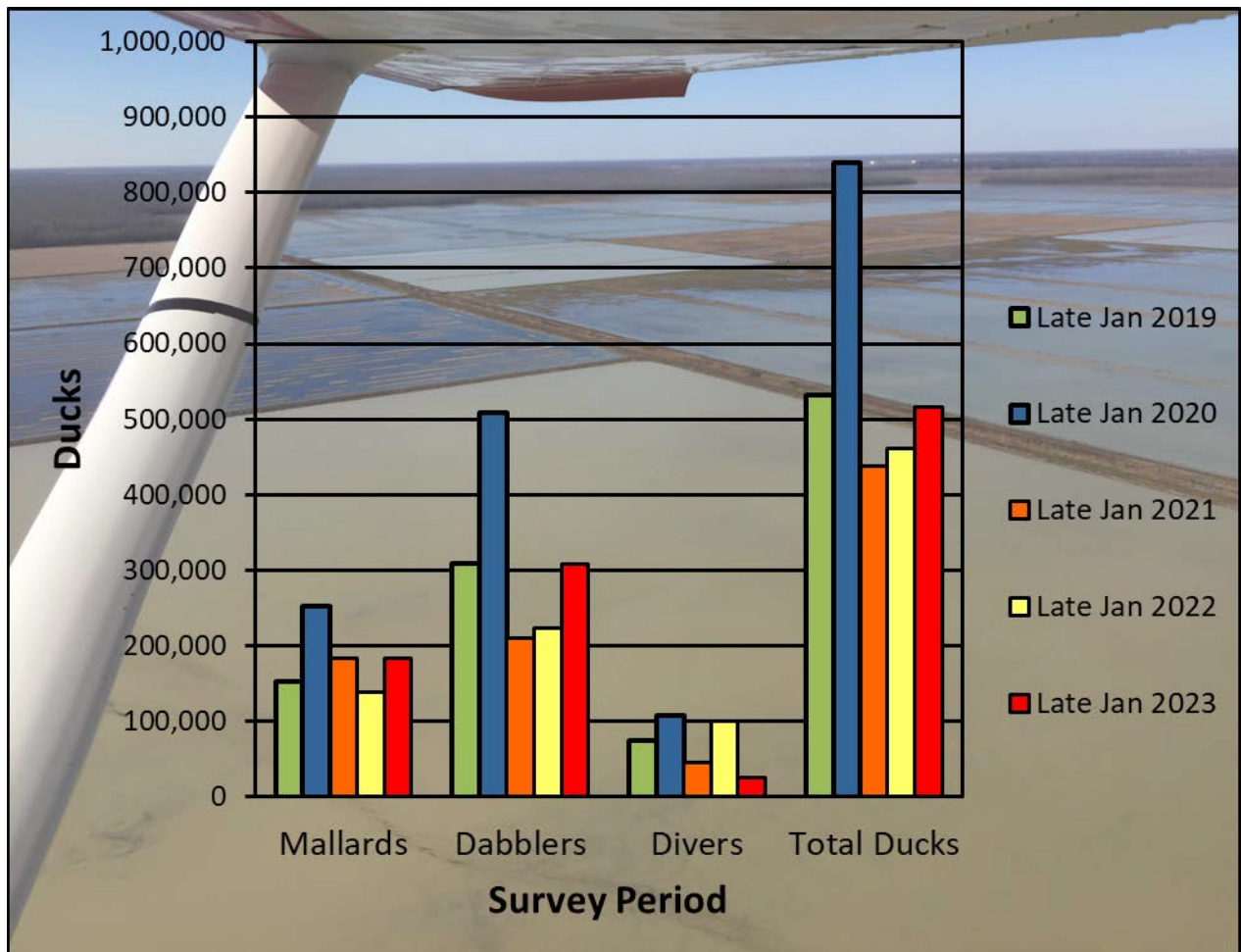
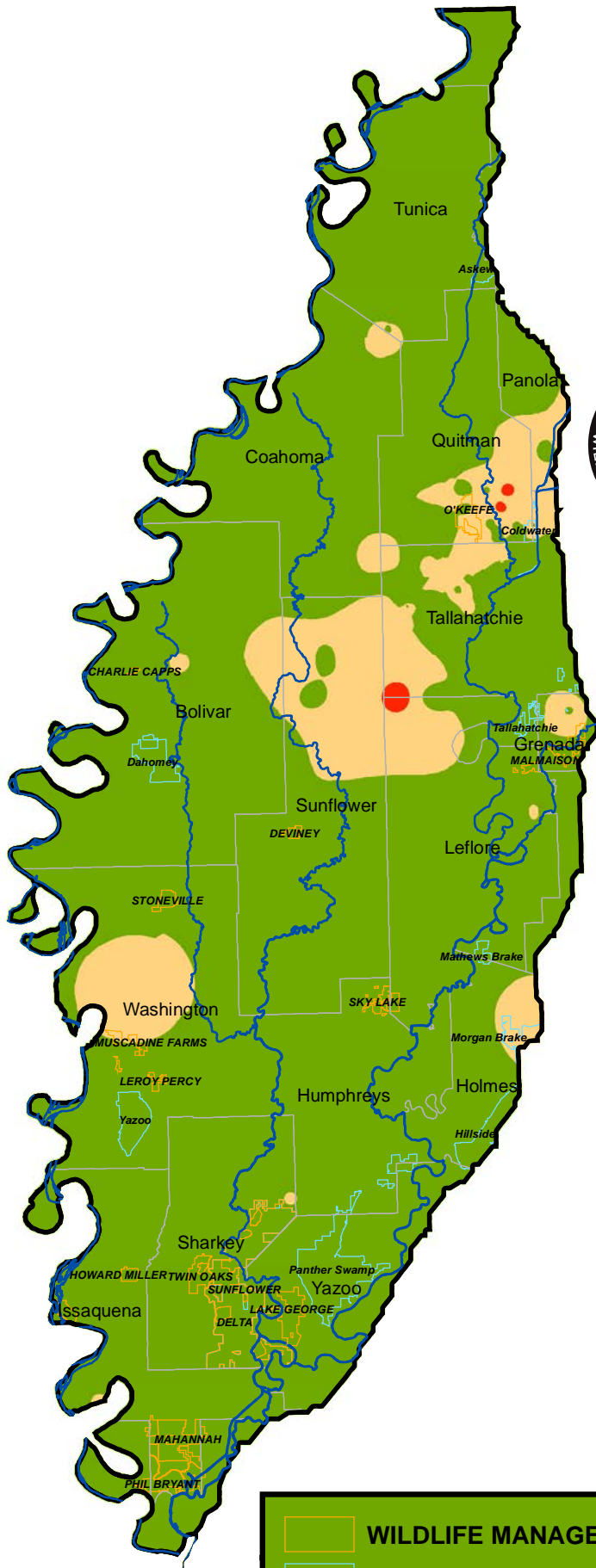


Table 2. Comparison of late January 2023 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for late January survey estimates.

Species Group	Late Jan 2023	Late Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	182,649	217,342	-15.9%
Other Dabblers	307,643	359,809	-14.5%
Diving Ducks	25,942	113,820	-77.2%
Total Ducks	516,153	680,908	-24.2%

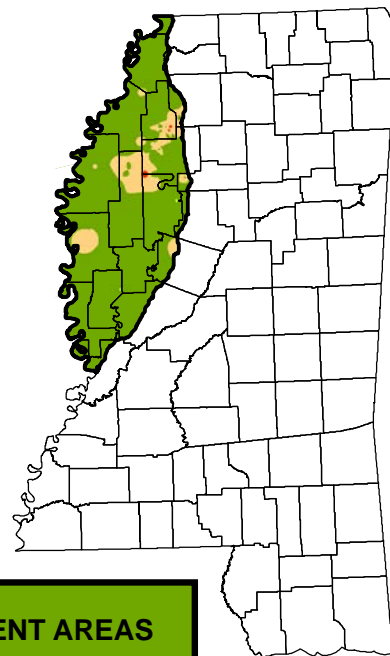
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 17 - 23, 2023



Description

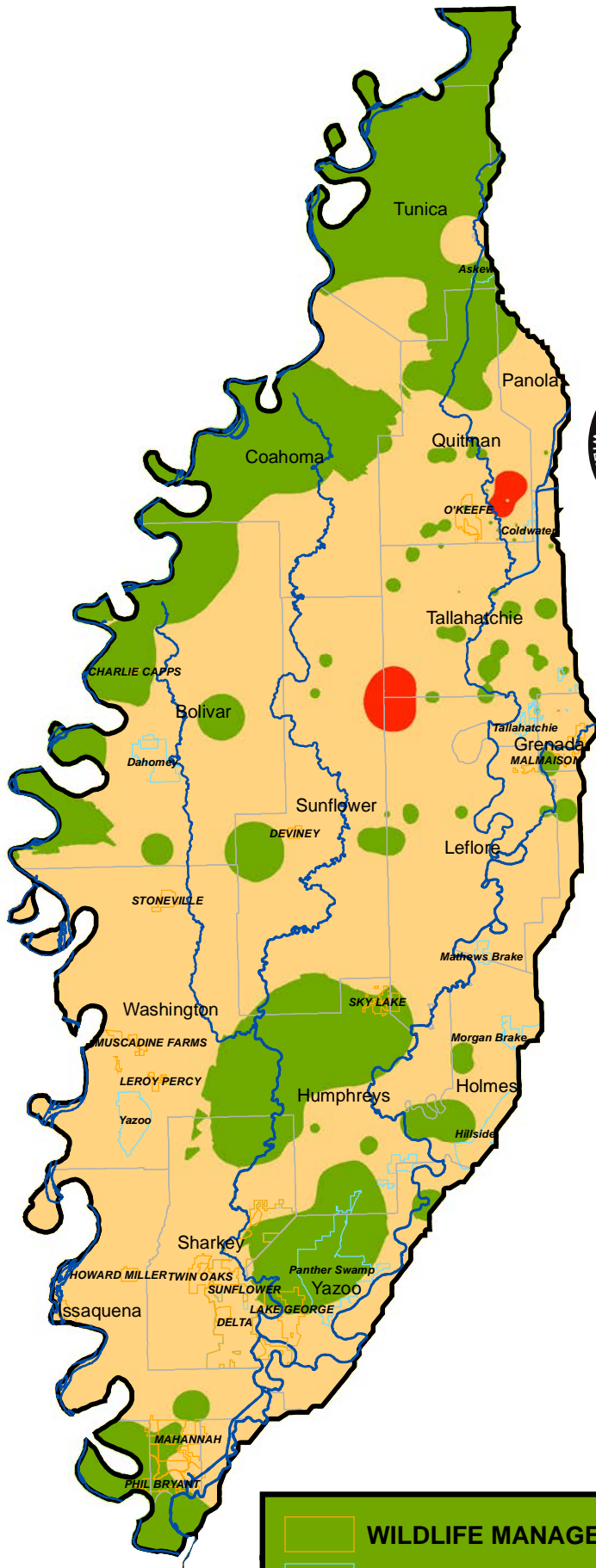
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



- WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS
- NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

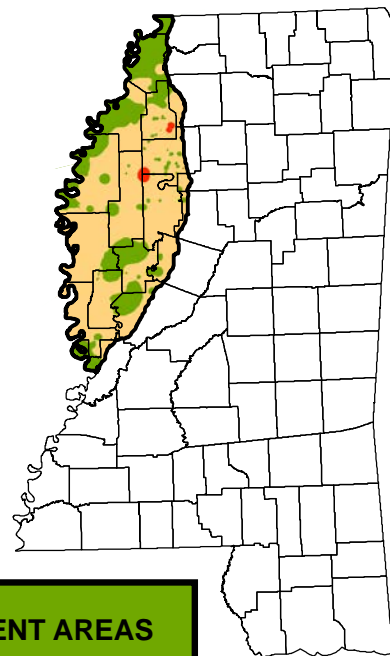
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 17 - 23, 2023



Description

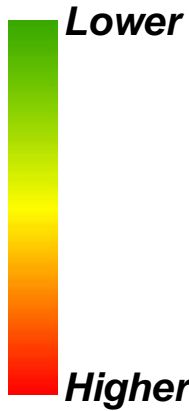
- Low (<12/mi2)
- Medium (12-115/mi2)
- High (>115/mi2)



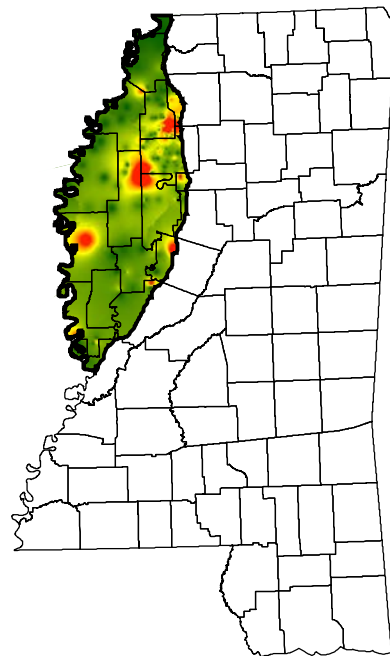
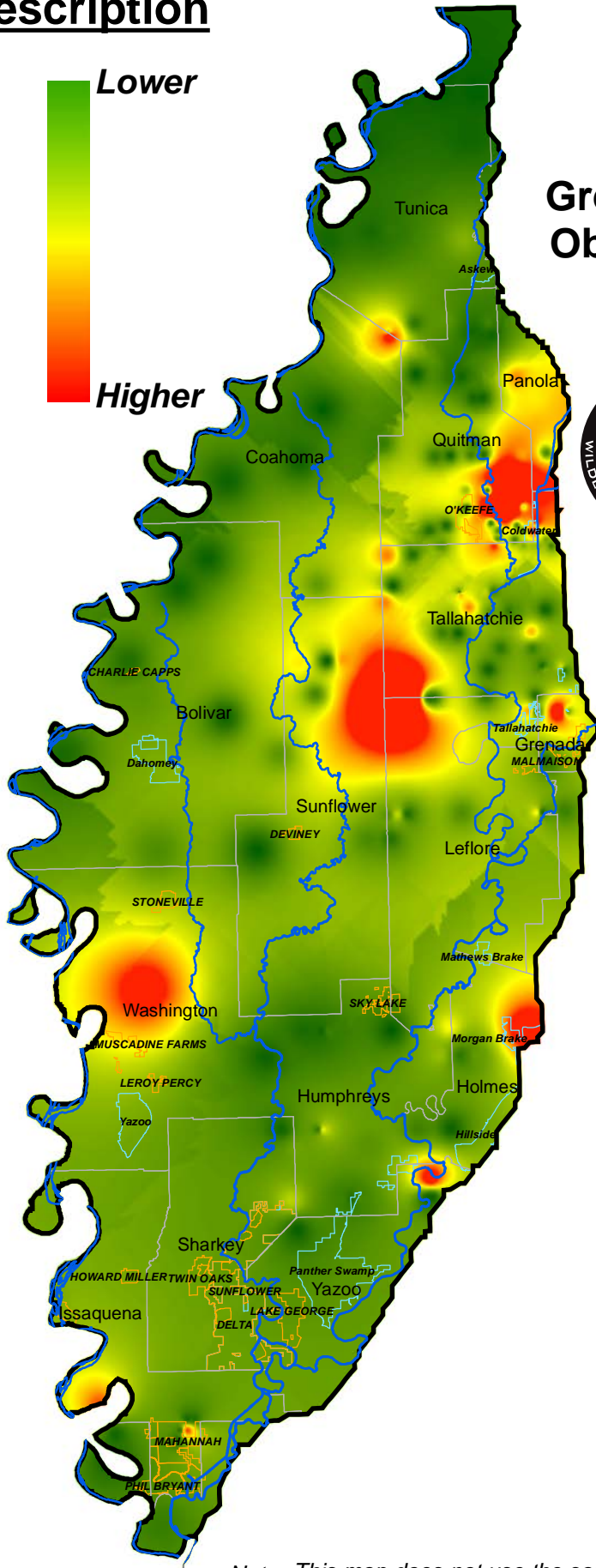
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Description

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Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 17 - 23, 2023

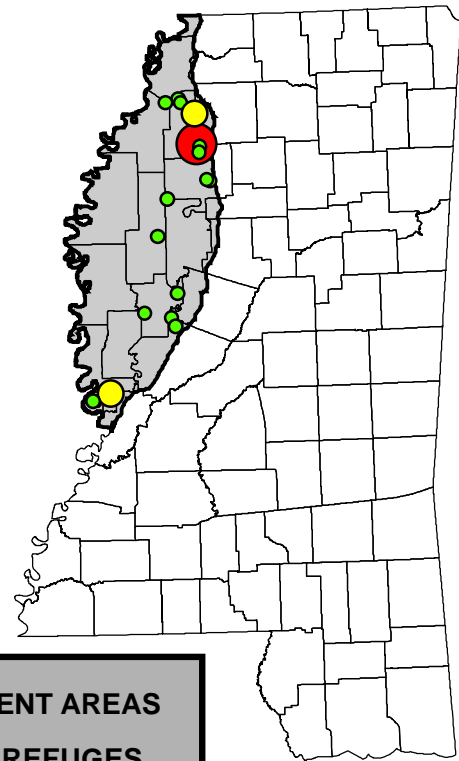
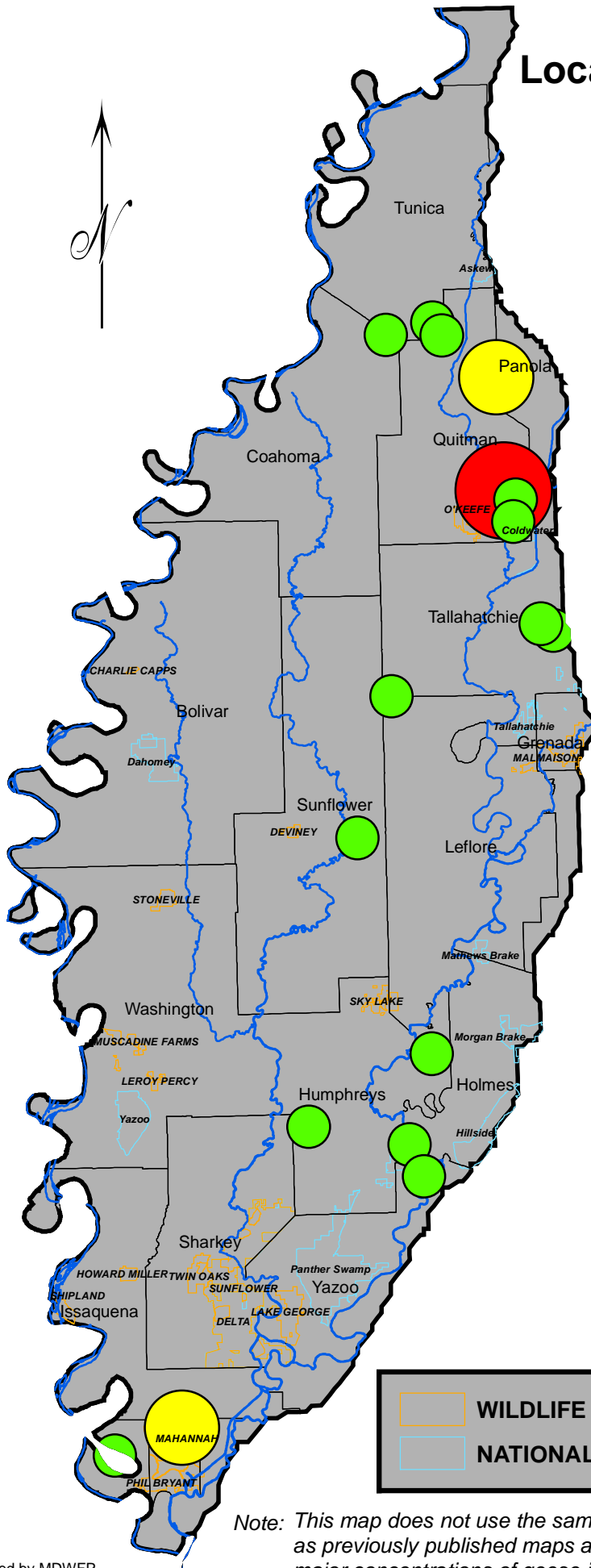
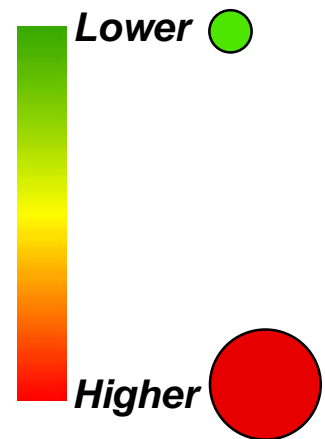


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.


Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 17 - 23, 2023



Description



 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

 NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

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