



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 15 - 19, 2021



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

Prepared by:

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The first MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred November 15 – 19, 2021. Similar to last November, wetland habitat availability was well below average for much of the Mississippi Delta. While permanent and semi-permanent wetlands like oxbow lakes and sloughs had adequate water levels, shallow, seasonal water was not widely distributed. Public lands held the majority of intensively managed waterfowl habitat. As a result, waterfowl were observed responding to these areas, often in high numbers relative to the rest of the Delta. A large portion of harvested agricultural fields have been or are currently being disked, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl if the fields are eventually flooded. On the bright side, much opportunity remains for landowners and managers to capture rainfall with water control structures as fall and winter continue along, and as more waterfowl migrate south into the state. As in most years, flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northeast portion of the Delta.

Last week's total duck abundance estimate for the Mississippi Delta was similar to the long-term average for November surveys, as was the estimate for dabbling ducks other than mallards (Tables 1 and 2). Mallard and diving duck estimates were below their long-term averages for this time of year. Dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised 56% of all duck observations. Northern shovelers and mallards were the two most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall. Scaup and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, largely due to the number of aquaculture ponds occurring along survey routes. The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall.

Mallards were most commonly observed using shallowly flooded natural, moist-soil vegetation. It should be noted that very few agricultural fields were flooded during this survey, but this type of habitat will become much more available later in the season. Most other dabbling ducks were observed using aquaculture complexes and semi-permanent or permanent wetlands with aquatic vegetation. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. In general, ducks were not evenly distributed across available wetland habitat. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups, which is typical of early-season behavior in areas with managed complexes of diverse wetland habitat. Biologists speculate that ducks will soon begin to distribute further as new wetland habitats become available. Much of the state received some rainfall over the weekend after this survey was concluded. Relatively few concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey, but numbers are expected to increase as the hunting season progresses.

The regular duck hunting season is set to open November 26, and MDWFP biologists are optimistic that state WMAs will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for a great start to the season. Even with relatively low duck numbers overall, WMAs with water management capabilities can often have great early season hunting success. Low temperatures are currently forecasted to dip toward the freezing mark late this week, perhaps producing conditions strong enough to increase waterfowl migration into southern latitudes.

Weekly waterfowl reports will begin the week following the duck season opener, and will include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions. For

weekly waterfowl reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

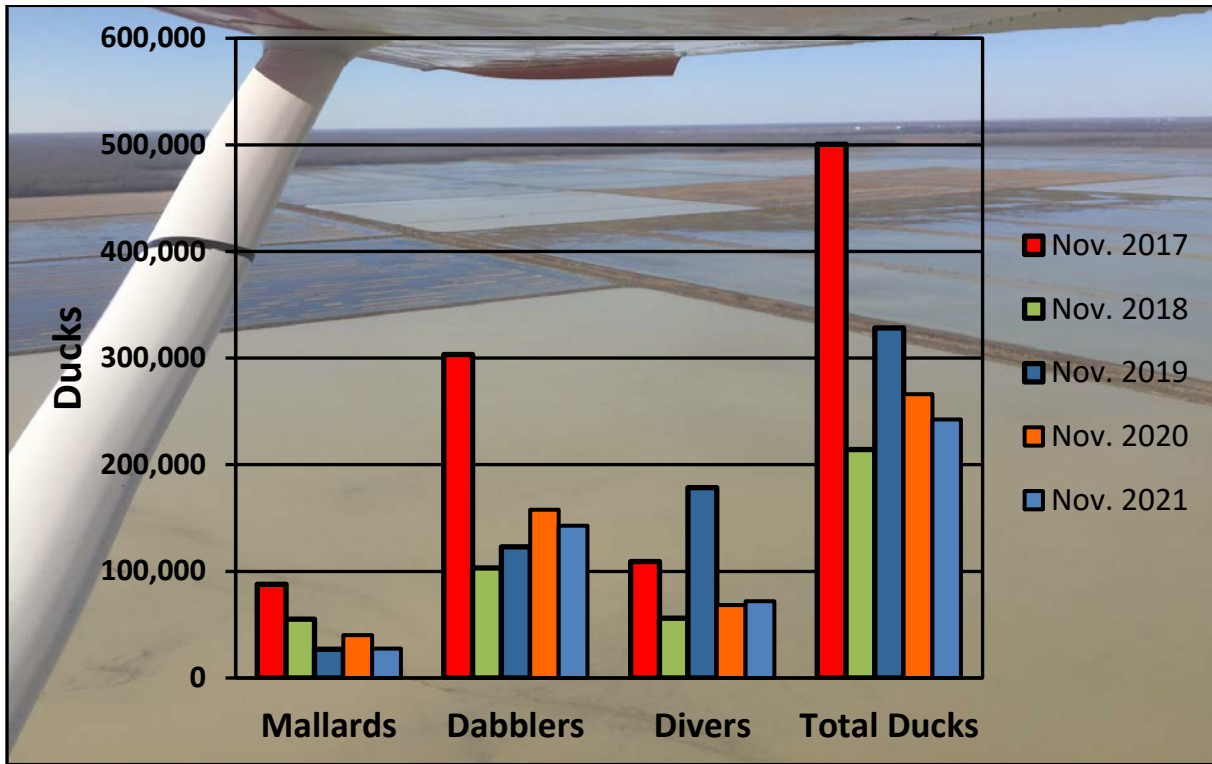
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the November survey periods, 2007-2021.

	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
2019-20	26,866	123,036	178,488	328,390
2020-21	40,100	157,750	68,343	266,194
2021-22	27,462	142,941	71,940	242,344
Average	40,647	142,522	87,246	270,344

Table 2. Comparison of November 2021 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

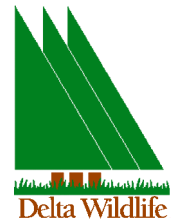
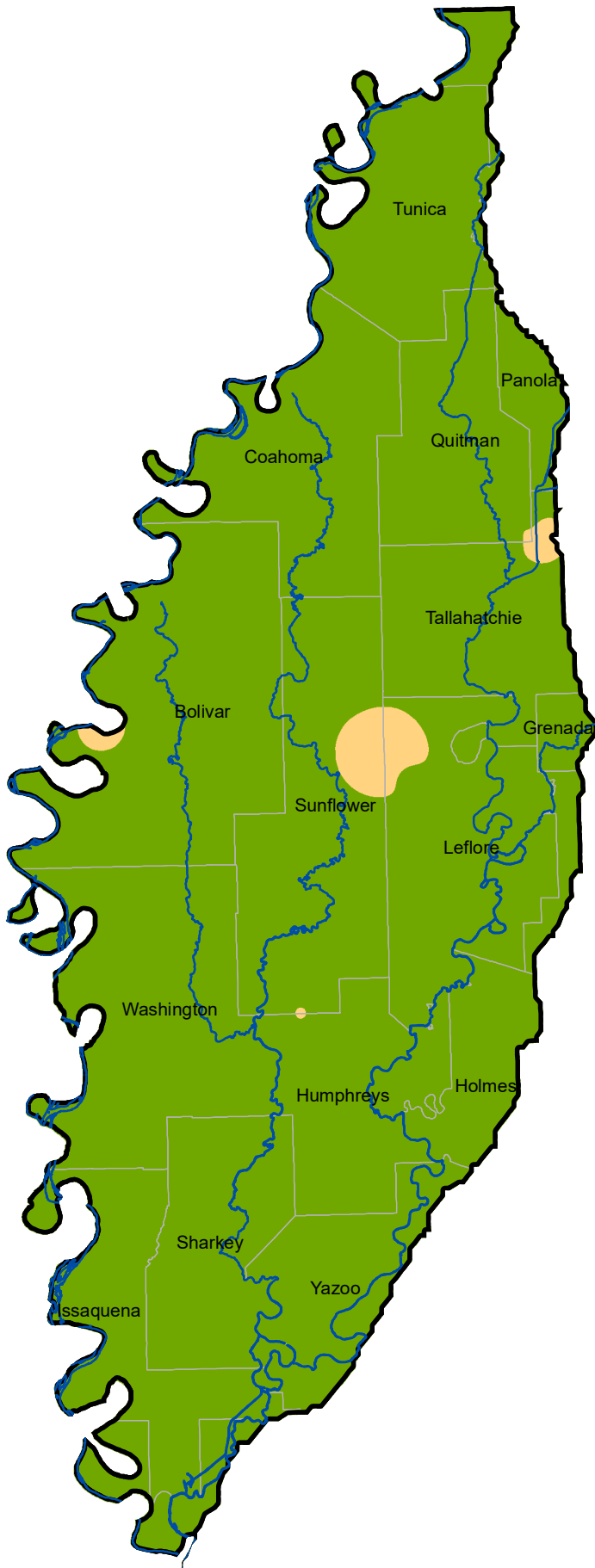
Species Group	November 2021	November LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	27,462	40,647	-32.5%
Other Dabblers	142,941	142,522	+0.3%
Diving Ducks	71,940	87,246	-17.6%
Total Ducks	242,344	270,344	-10.4%

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



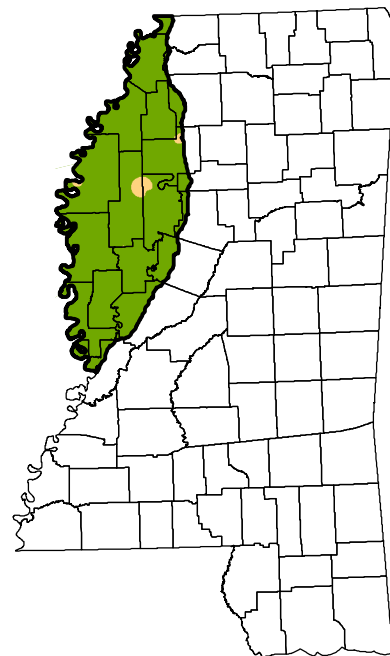
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 15-19, 2021



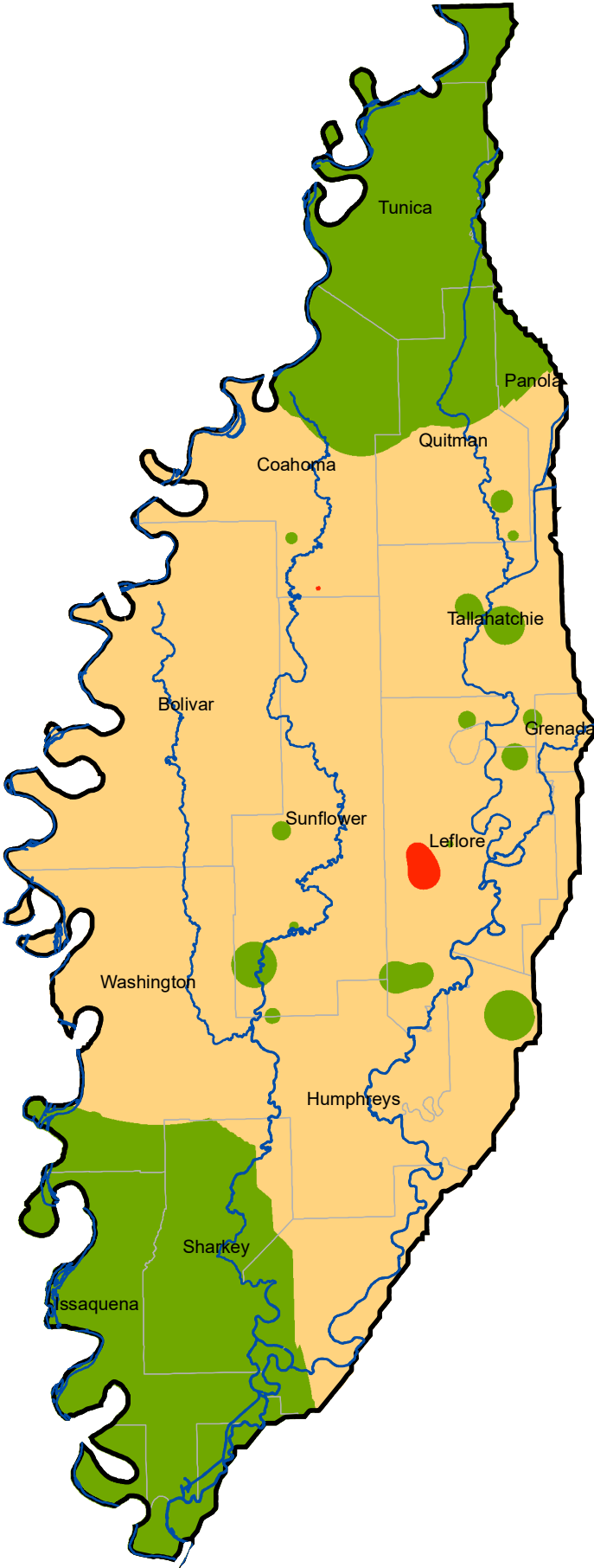
Description

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



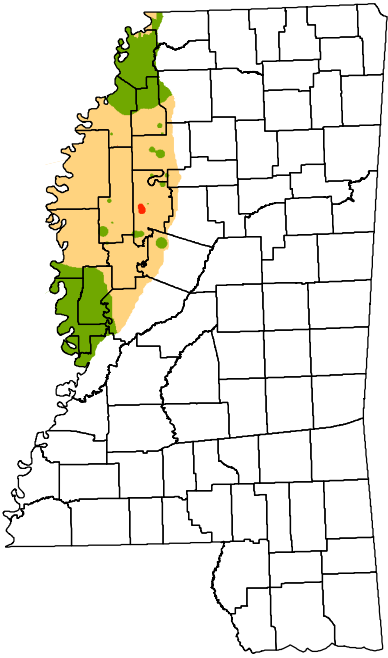
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 15-19, 2021

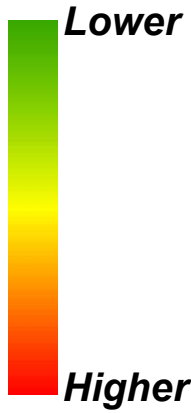


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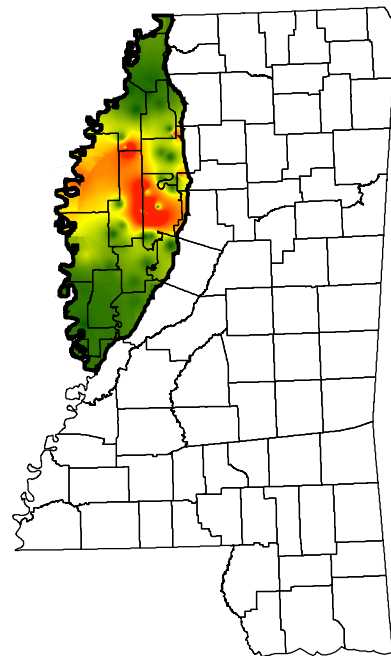
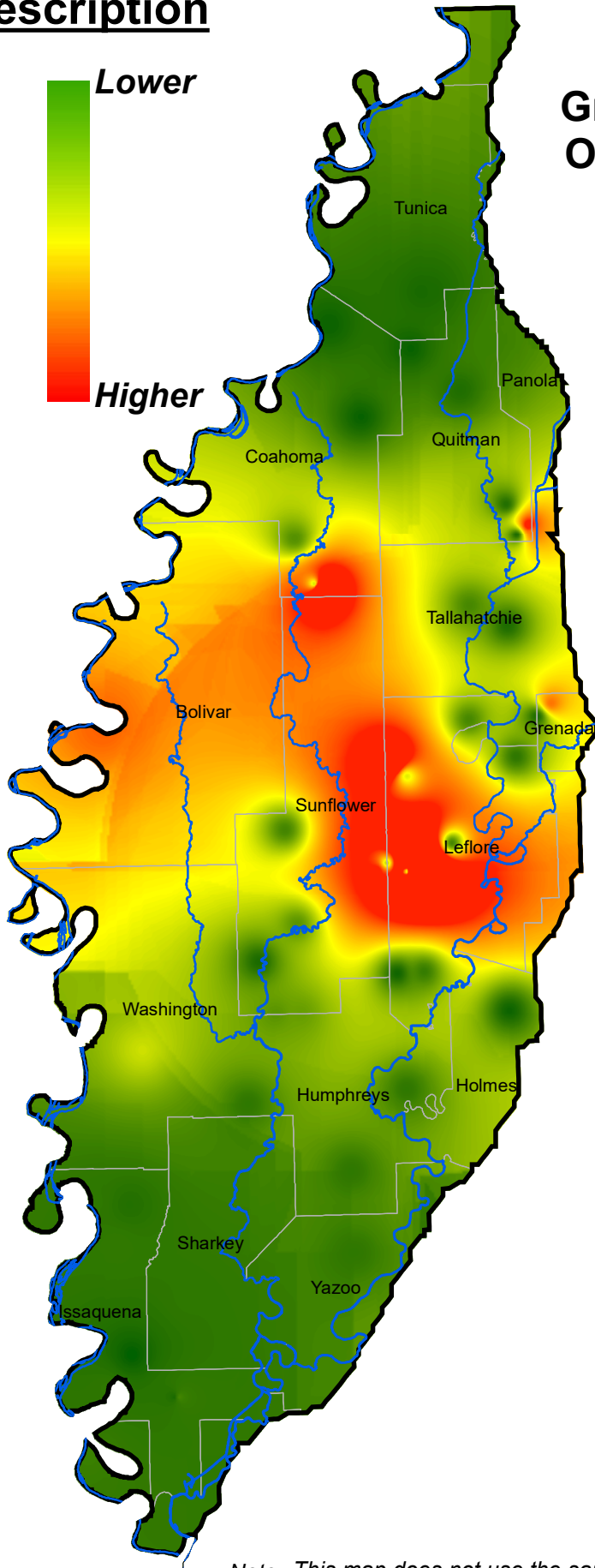
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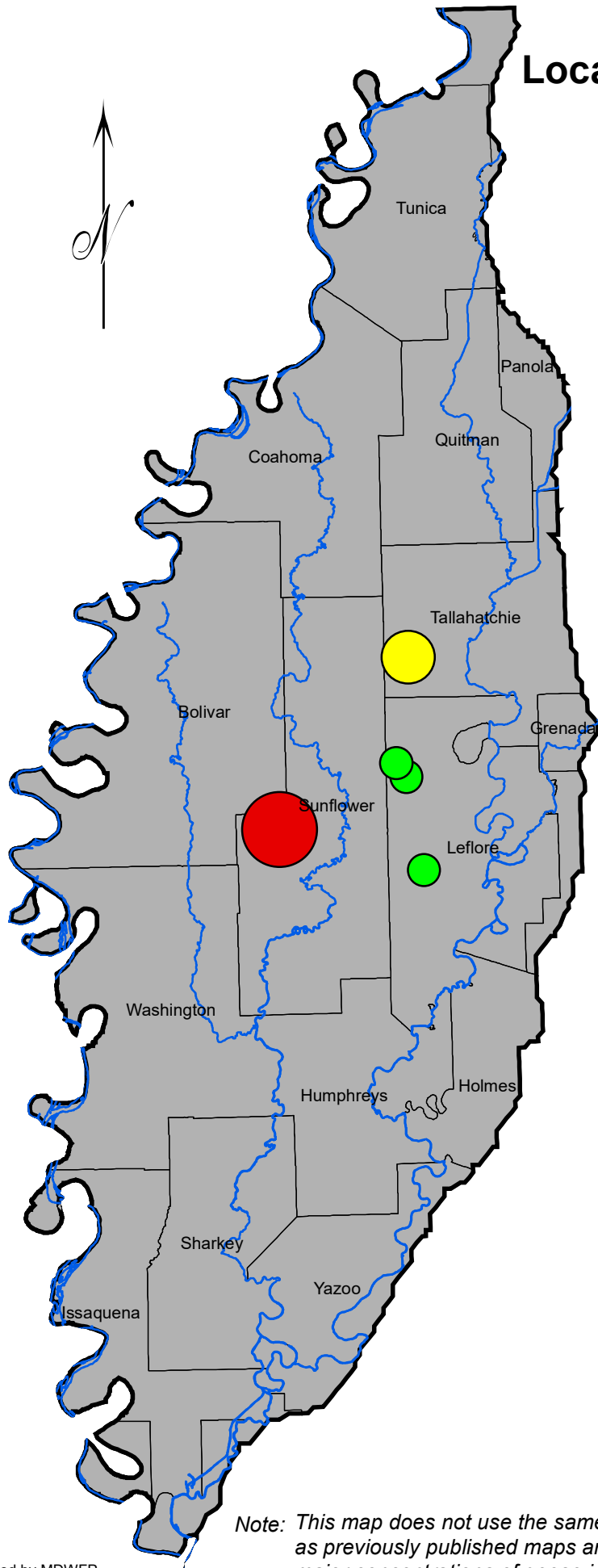


Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 15-19, 2021

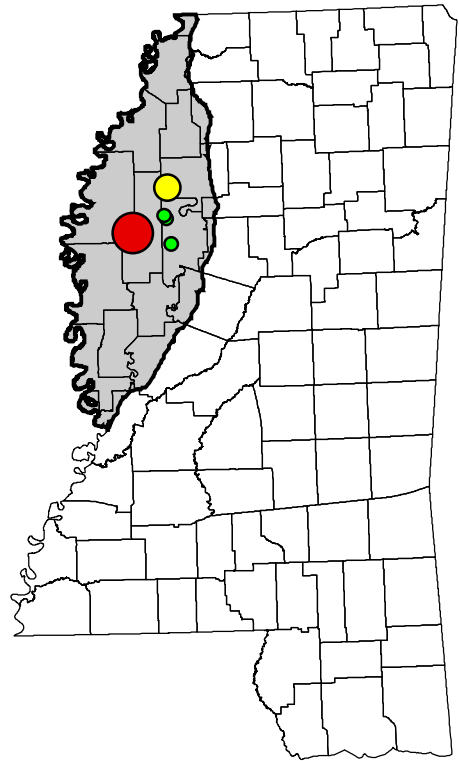
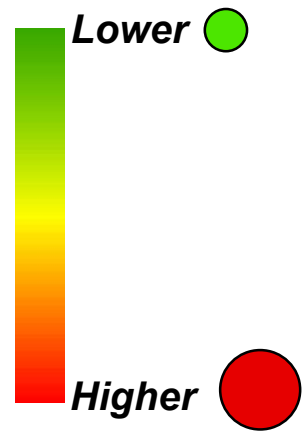


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 15 -19, 2021



Description



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.