MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 12 - 15, 2024

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The first MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred November 12 – 15, 2024, and similar to November 2023, dry conditions dominated observations across the Mississippi Delta. Shallow, seasonal water was not widely distributed during this survey, which is common for this time of year in Mississippi. Public lands are currently providing a large proportion of intensively managed waterfowl habitat, and as a result, ducks were seen responding to these areas in relatively high numbers compared to the rest of the Delta. Ducks were also observed using areas with large complexes of managed water across multiple private properties. As a result of the dry fall, most harvested agricultural fields have been disked, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl even if the fields are eventually flooded. 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.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta were well below the November long-term averages for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks (Tables 1 and 2). Dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised 87% of all duck observations. Green-winged teal, gadwall, and northern shovelers were the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall. Scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed. The northwestern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall. Low waterfowl numbers during this survey were likely driven by a combination of dry conditions and very mild weather, as similar results have been recently observed in other states in the Southeast. The good news is the weather pattern this week has finally shifted to more favorable conditions for continued southern migrations and field reports over the last few days have noted increasing waterfowl numbers. It’s also important to note that Mississippi’s November duck estimates are often not strong indicators of where peak numbers could reach later in the winter.

In the Mississippi Delta, mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using flooded agricultural fields. It should be noted that very few agricultural fields were flooded during this survey, but available flooded fields were attractive to ducks. 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 expect ducks to begin to distribute further as new wetland habitats become available throughout the winter. A large portion of the state received much needed rain early this week, but habitat conditions in many areas will remain below average levels during the early part of the hunting season. No concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’) or greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey, but recent reports suggest that numbers are now increasing.

The regular duck hunting season is set to open Thursday, November 28, and MDWFP biologists are optimistic that state WMAs with groundwater pumping capabilities will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for an enjoyable start to the season. Despite low duck numbers overall, public and private lands with the ability to manage water can often have great early season hunting success.

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 on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl.

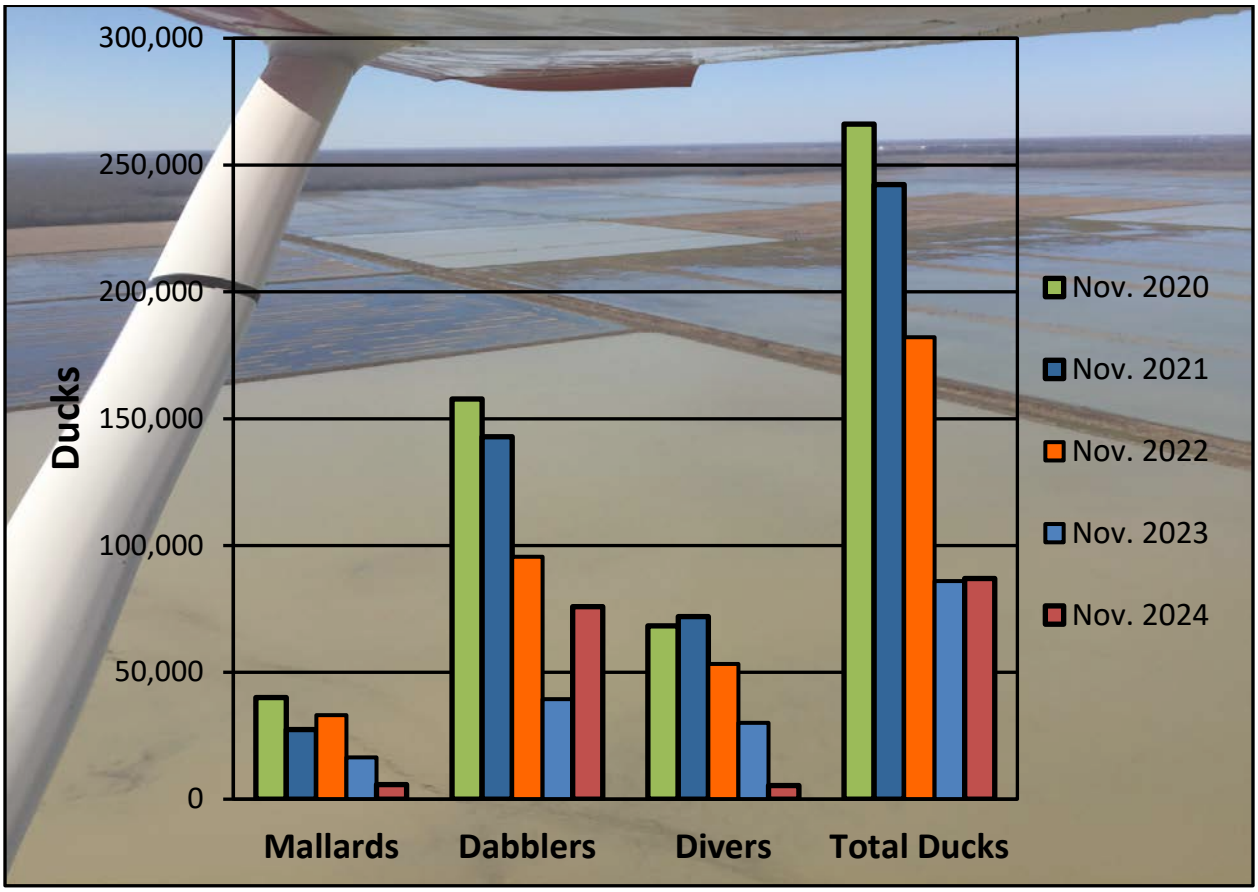
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the November survey periods, 2007-2024.

	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
2022-23	33,149	95,574	53,346	182,069
2023-24	16,446	39,438	30,152	86,035
2024-25	5,741	75,902	5,369	87,011
Average	**36,484**	**128,981**	**76,442**	**241,907**

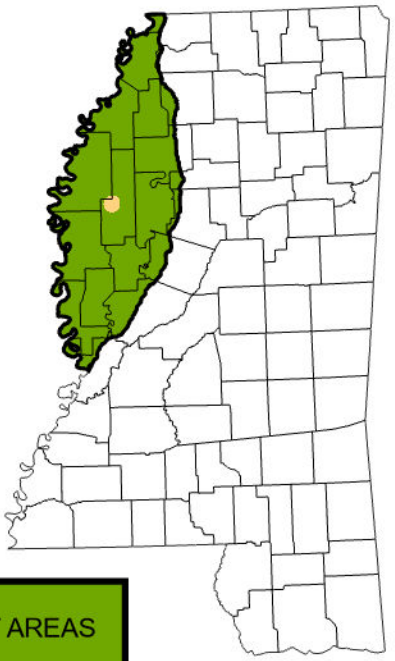
Table 2. Comparison of November 2024 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

Species Group	November 2024	November LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	5,741	36,484	-84%
Other Dabblers	75,902	128,981	-41%
Diving Ducks	5,369	76,442	-93%
Total Ducks	**87,011**	**241,907**	**-64%**

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. 12-15, 2024



Description

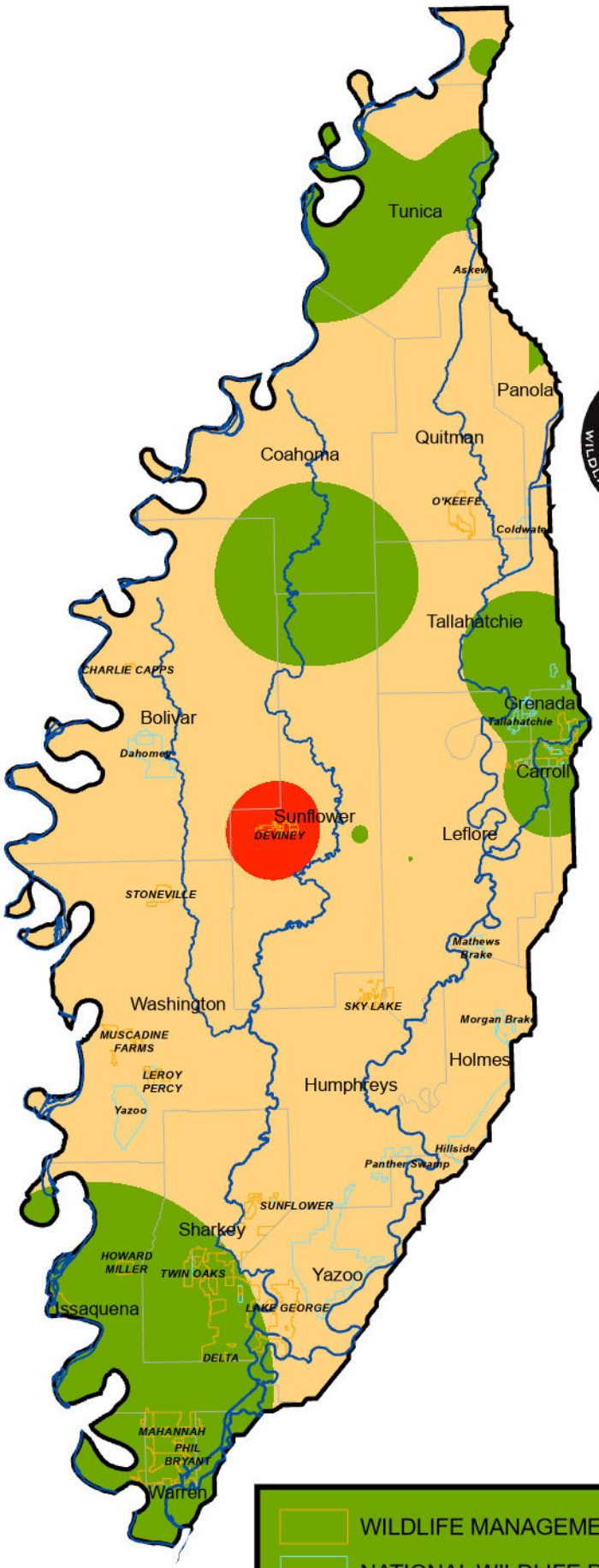
- Low (<12/mi2)
- Medium (12-115/mi2)
- High (>115/mi2)

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 20 Nov. 2023

Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 12-15, 2024



Description

- Low (<12/mi2)
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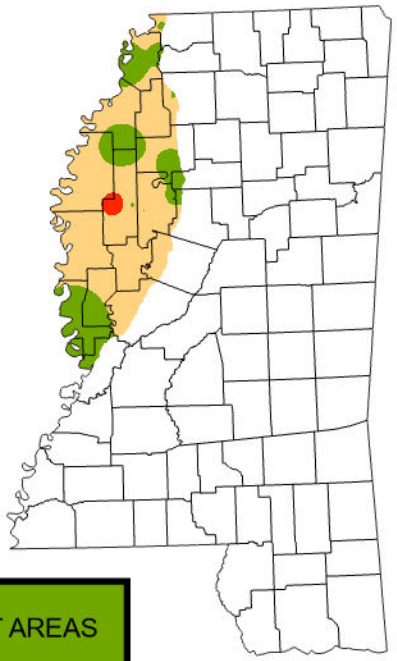

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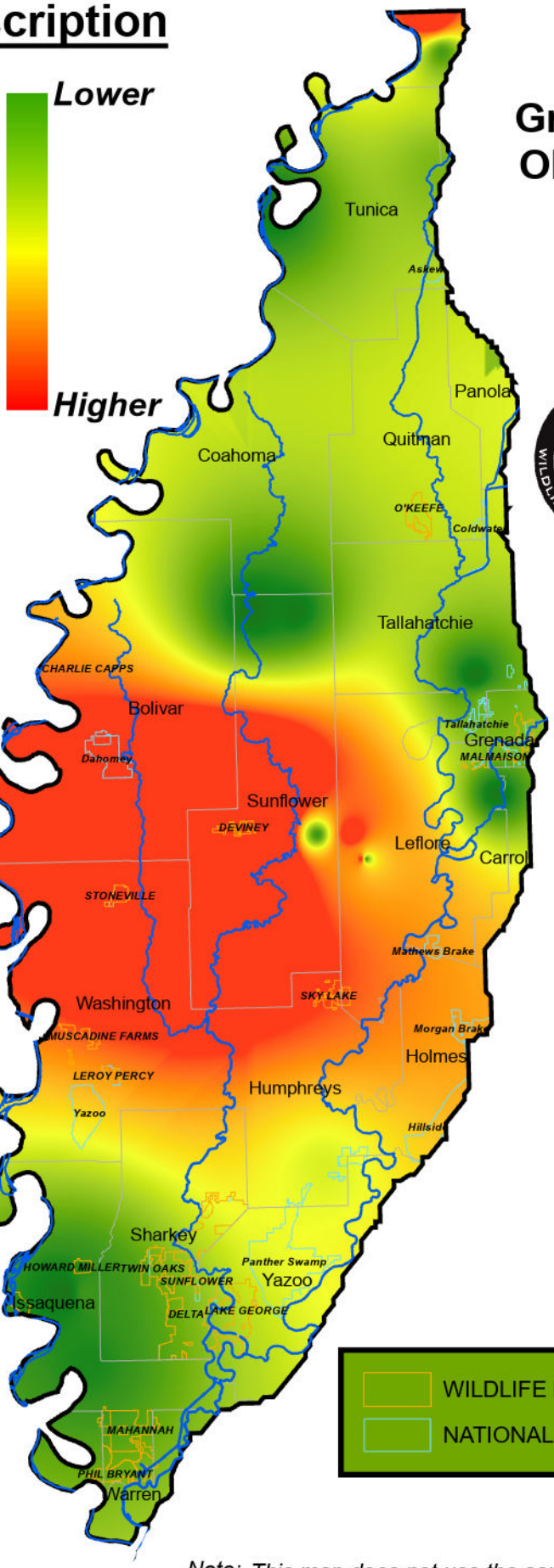
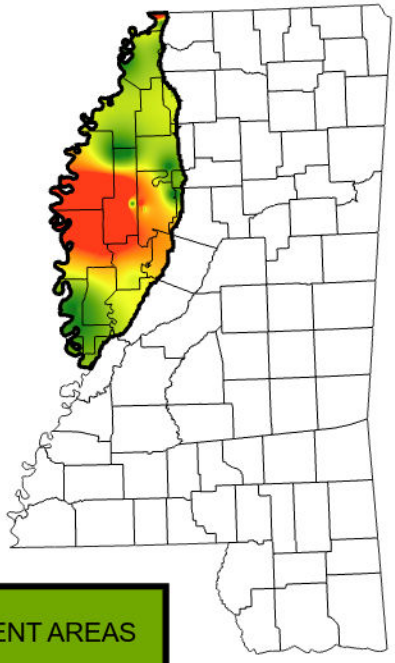


Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 12-15, 2024



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 ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

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