



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 10 - 13, 2024



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

Prepared by:
Houston Havens, Darrin Hardesty, and Taylor Gibson
MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
601-432-2199

The second MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred December 10 – 13, 2024. Wetland habitat abundance in the Mississippi Delta has increased since mid-November, but overall wetland conditions were still below average for this time of year. 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 extremely dry fall, a larger than usual portion of harvested agricultural fields have been disked, likely resulting in reduced food availability for waterfowl even if these areas are eventually flooded in late winter. On the bright side, substantial opportunity still remains for landowners and managers to capture rainfall with water control structures as winter continues and as more waterfowl migrate into the state. Flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northern portions of the Delta.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta increased significantly from the November survey, but remained below the December long-term averages for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks (Tables 1 and 2). However, December 2024 estimates were nearly double those from last December. Dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised 70% of all duck observations and accounted for most of the increase since mid-November. Green-winged teal, gadwall, and northern shovelers remained the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall. Ring-necked ducks and scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed. The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall.

In the Mississippi Delta, mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using flooded agricultural fields. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. As in November, ducks were not evenly distributed across available wetland habitat. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups 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. In stark contrast to November, large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and many greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey and were relatively widespread across the Delta region.

The regular waterfowl hunting seasons are now in full swing and will continue through January 31. The next aerial waterfowl survey is planned for the week of January 6th. Mississippi typically experiences peak numbers of wintering waterfowl during the month of January, and hunters are hopeful that this year is no different.

Weekly waterfowl reports which include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions are now being posted each Tuesday on the MDWFP website and social media platforms. For these reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

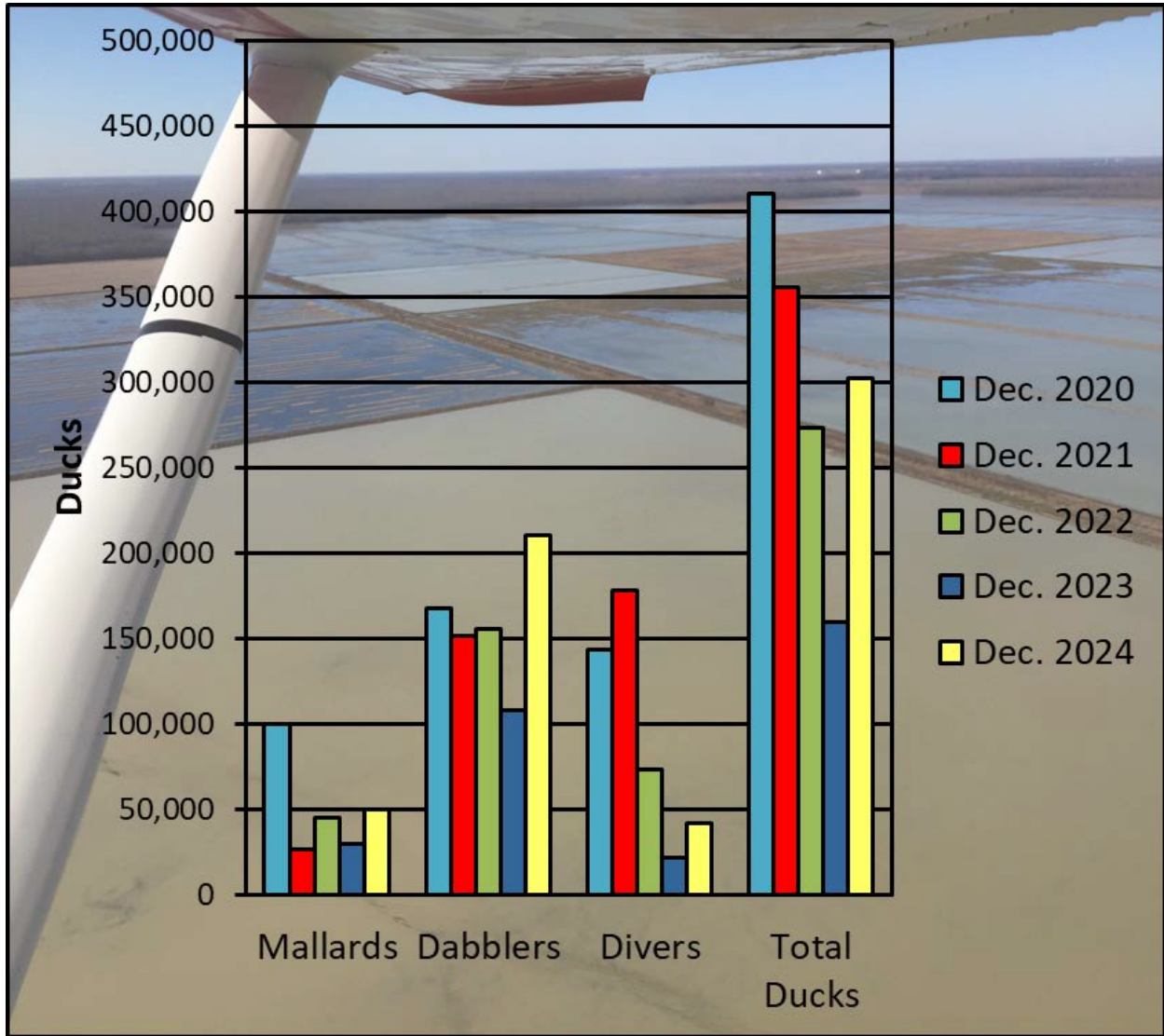
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey periods, 2007-2024.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2007	50,368	75,604	41,738	167,710
2008	223,976	389,939	70,750	684,665
2009	116,748	209,346	74,396	400,491
2010	210,531	388,064	236,966	835,561
2011	136,776	281,560	111,423	529,758
2012	122,779	176,950	171,542	471,271
2013	230,634	638,386	100,412	969,432
2014	86,838	331,460	102,117	520,415
2015	139,805	193,719	90,958	424,482
2016	202,135	460,752	146,707	809,594
2017	100,389	366,802	208,749	675,940
2018	84,032	176,070	143,417	403,519
2019	105,827	176,863	104,843	387,533
2020	99,767	167,139	143,458	410,365
2021	26,403	151,460	177,615	355,478
2022	44,554	155,597	73,045	273,196
2023	29,753	108,173	21,809	159,735
2024	49,533	210,620	41,975	302,128
Average	114,492	258,806	114,551	487,848

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

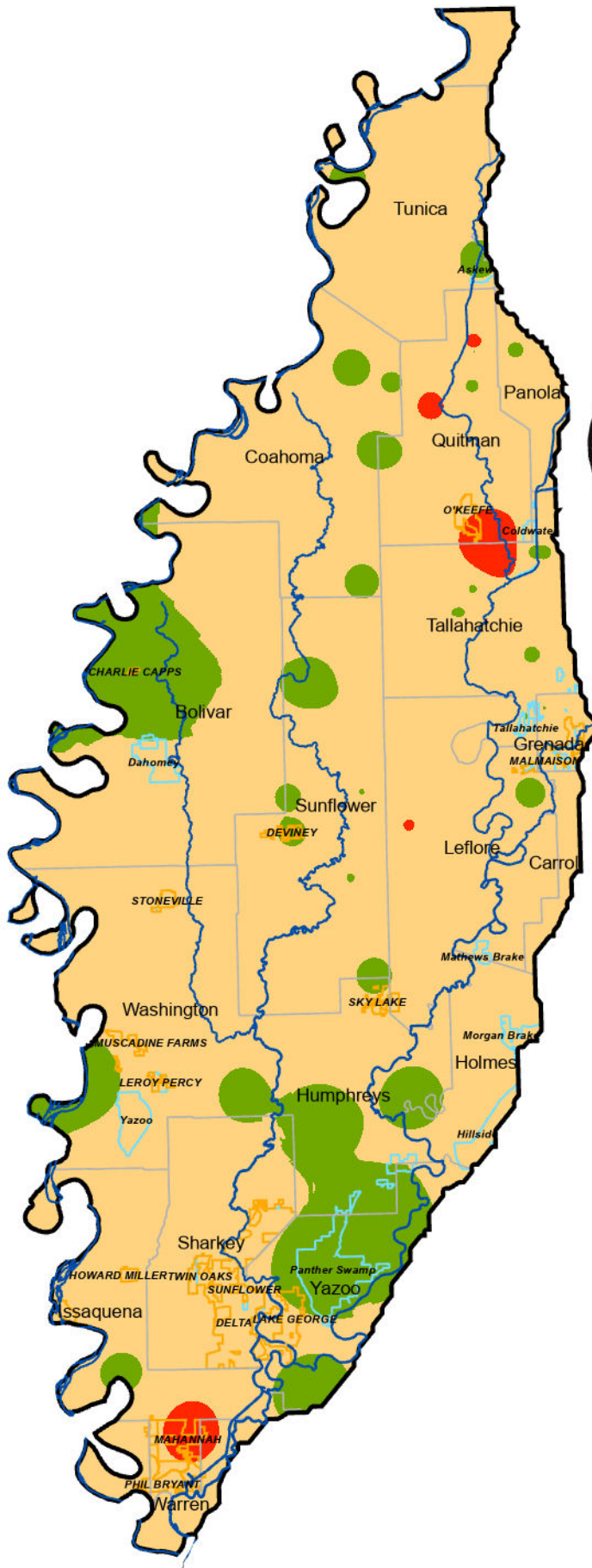
Species Group	December 2024	December LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	49,533	114,492	-57%
Other Dabblers	210,620	258,806	-19%
Diving Ducks	41,975	114,551	-63%
Total Ducks	302,128	487,848	-38%

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



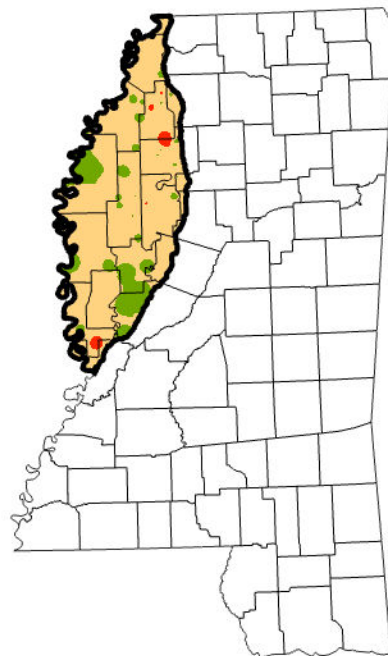
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 10 - 13. 2024



Description

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



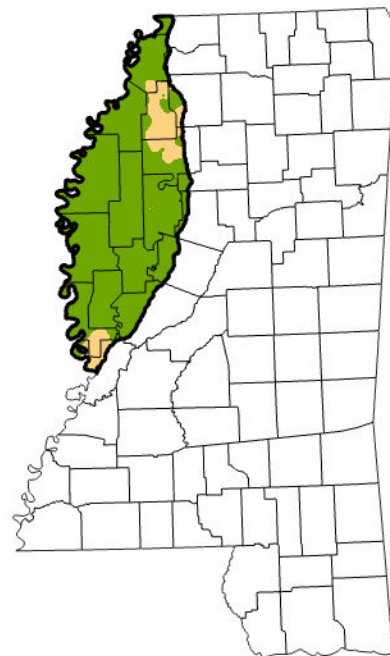
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Dec. 10 - 13, 2024

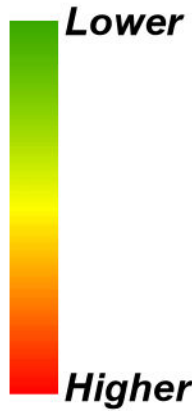


Description

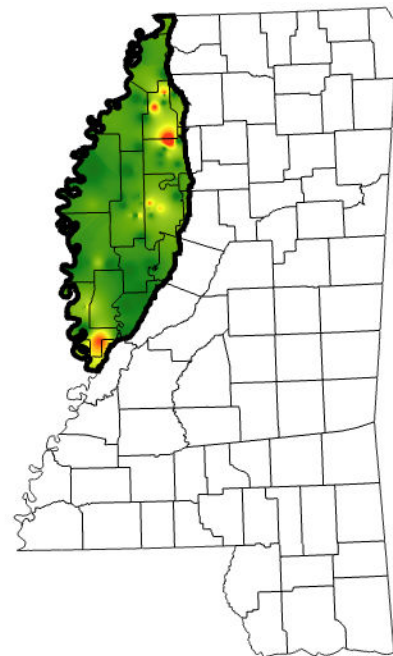
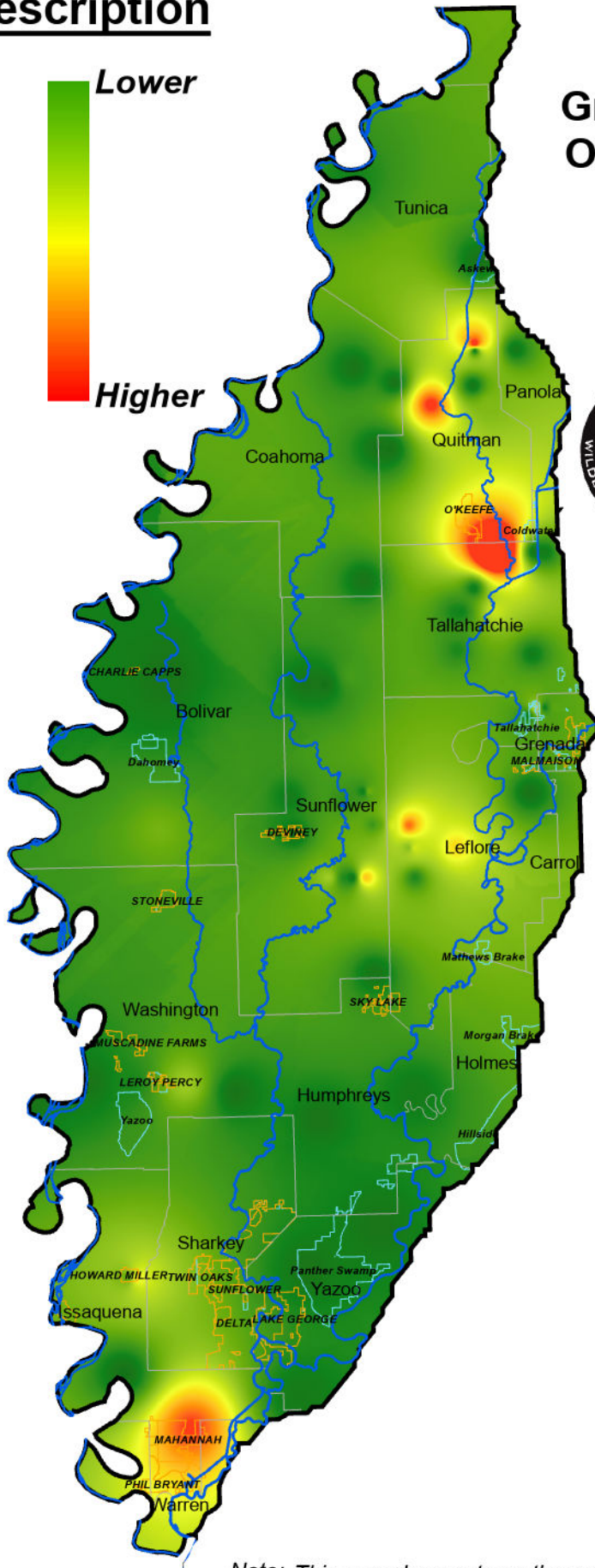
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Description



Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 10 - 13, 2024

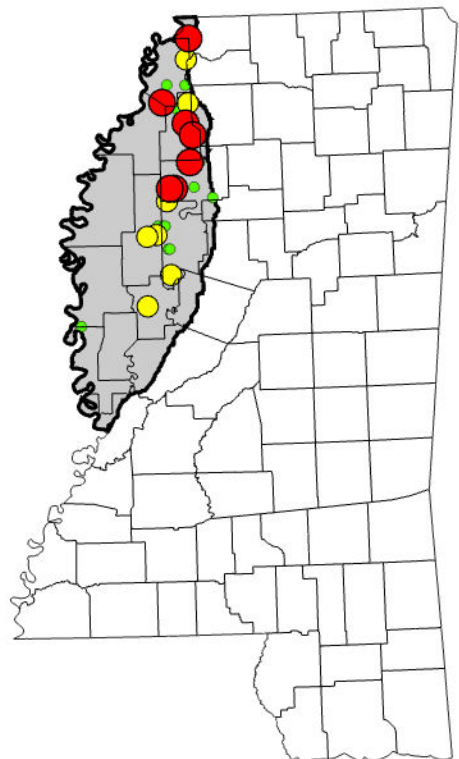
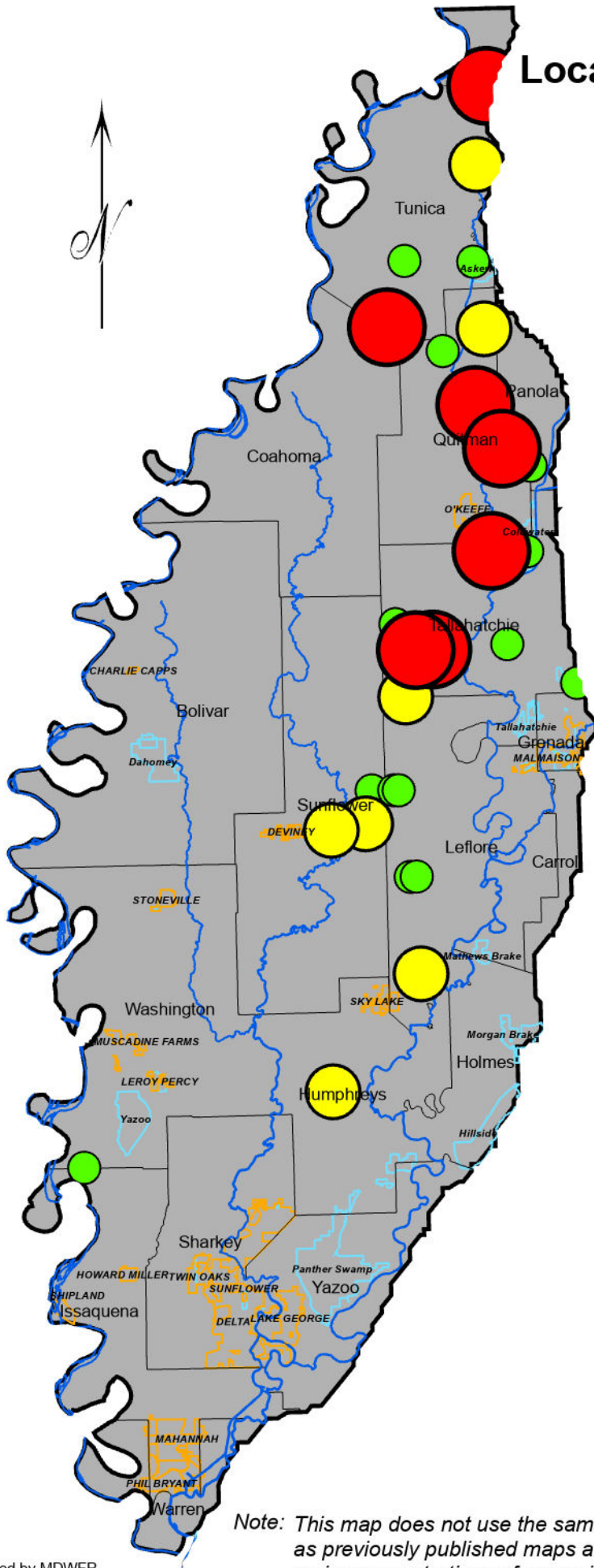
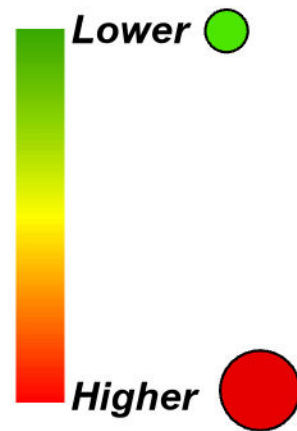


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 10 - 13, 2024



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.