MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 7 - 13, 2025

WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The mid-winter MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey was flown January 7 – 13, 2025. Wetland habitat abundance in the Mississippi Delta has increased since mid-December and appeared to be near average for this time of year. Once again, ducks were observed using areas with large complexes of managed water across multiple properties in the immediately surrounding landscape. 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 when flooded. Flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northern portions of the Delta. The Mississippi River and its interior Delta tributaries have experienced increased water levels since mid-December, but little to no natural over-bank flooding has occurred this winter.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta increased again from the December survey, with substantial increases for dabbling ducks other than mallards being the highlight (Tables 1 and 2). The estimate for non-mallard dabbling ducks exceeded the long-term average for this time of year, and diving ducks nearly reached their respective long-term average as well. While the mallard estimate nearly doubled from mid-December, it remained well below the long-term average for early January. Similar to December, dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised nearly 70% of all duck observations. Green-winged teal, gadwall, and northern shovelers remained the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, but substantial concentrations of northern pintails were also observed in some areas. 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. It should be noted that the northernmost portions of the Delta were surveyed during one of the coldest days of the recent cold front, and ice on shallow wetlands in these areas likely impacted duck distributions.

In the Mississippi Delta, mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using flooded agricultural fields, likely as a result of relatively low temperatures and the need for high energy foods. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. Ducks were not as distributed across available wetland habitat as they typically would be expected to be this late in the season. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups in areas with managed complexes of diverse wetland habitat. Biologists expect ducks to remain relatively concentrated throughout the incoming freezing temperatures being forecasted, and then to become much more distributed when shallow wetlands thaw and become available again. As in December, large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and many greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey.

The regular waterfowl hunting seasons will continue through January 31. The next aerial waterfowl survey is planned for the week of January 20. Mississippi typically experiences peak numbers of wintering waterfowl during the month of January, and biologists and hunters are hopeful that late January will produce peak numbers this year. However, with forecasted temperatures next week, duck distributions could be impacted by ice, which could impact the ability to estimate duck abundance.

Weekly waterfowl reports which include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions are 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.

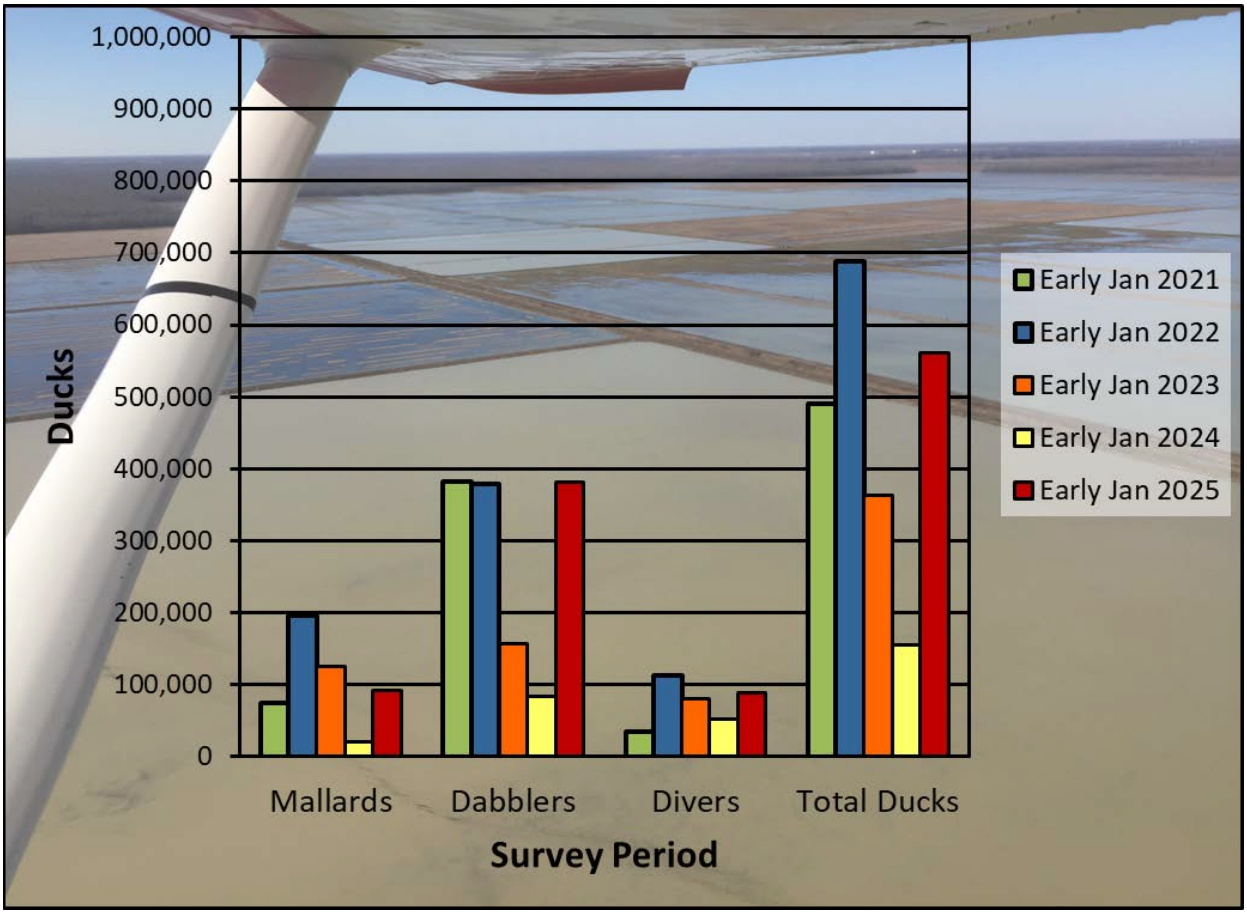
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the early January survey periods, 2008-2025.

	Mallards	**Dabblers**	**Divers**	**Total Ducks**
2008	204,322	248,542	74,342	527,205
2009	191,236	278,601	66,691	536,529
2010	281,622	440,314	170,797	892,734
2011	197,319	352,858	120,700	670,878
2012	215,268	339,908	100,202	655,379
2013	131,930	263,852	70,775	448,586
2014	313,851	742,182	191,888	1,244,714
2015	145,153	364,349	74,502	584,004
2016	213,759	210,159	109,414	521,662
2017	678,235	620,432	143,739	1,442,406
2018	484,121	595,303	49,488	1,128,912
2019	111,787	186,633	69,791	368,211
2020	173,834	367,714	58,875	600,423
2021	73,724	381,903	34,315	489,942
2022	195,533	379,391	113,217	688,141
2023	125,221	156,929	80,177	362,327
2024	20,869	82,800	51,401	155,070
2025	91,865	380,573	87,833	560,204
Average	**213,869**	**355,136**	**92,675**	**659,851**

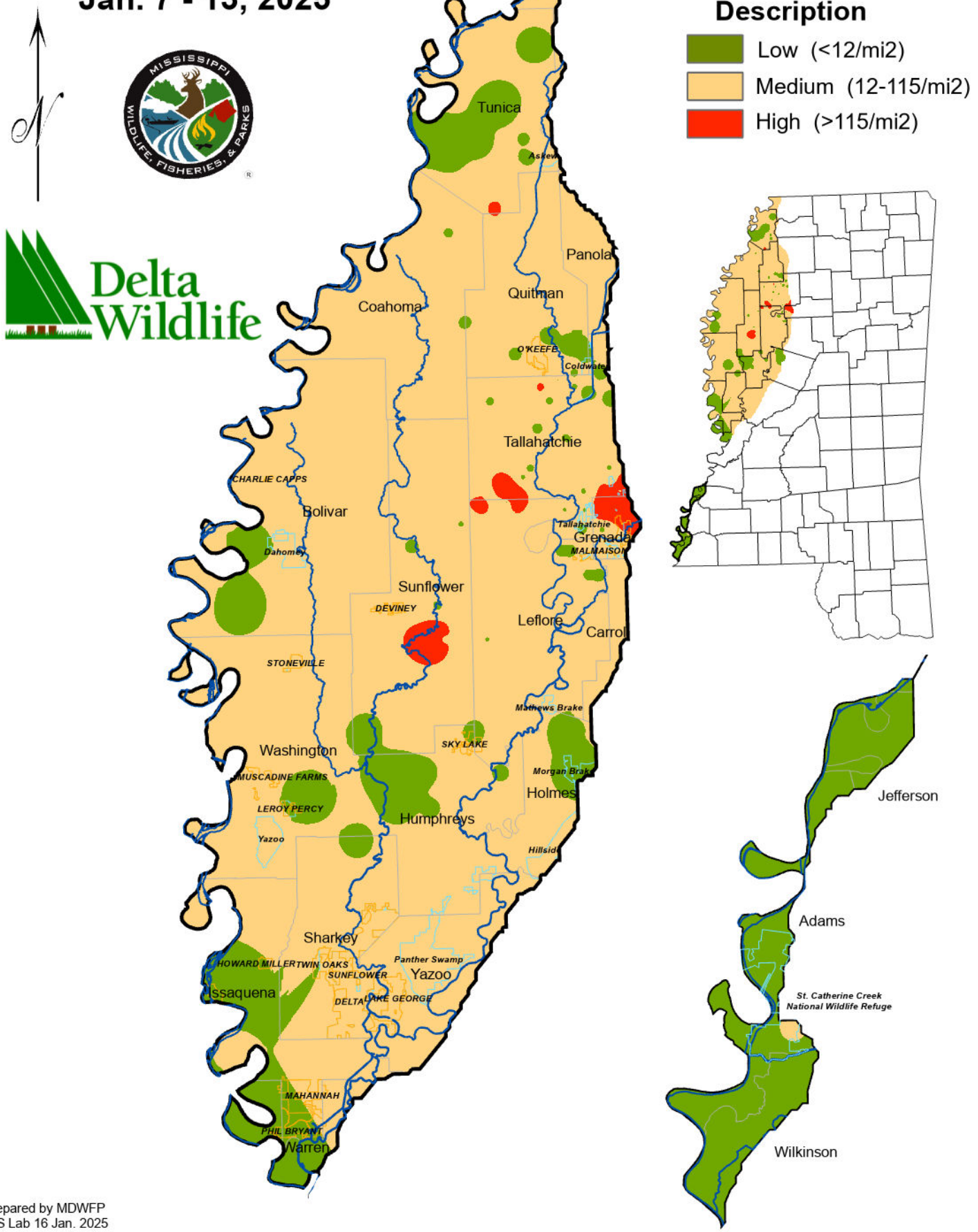
Table 2. Comparison of early January 2025 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for early January survey estimates.

Species Group	Early Jan 2025	Early Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	91,865	213,869	-57%
Other Dabblers	380,573	355,136	+7%
Diving Ducks	87,833	92,675	-5%
Total Ducks	**560,204**	**659,851**	**-15%**

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



Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta
Jan. 7 - 13, 2025



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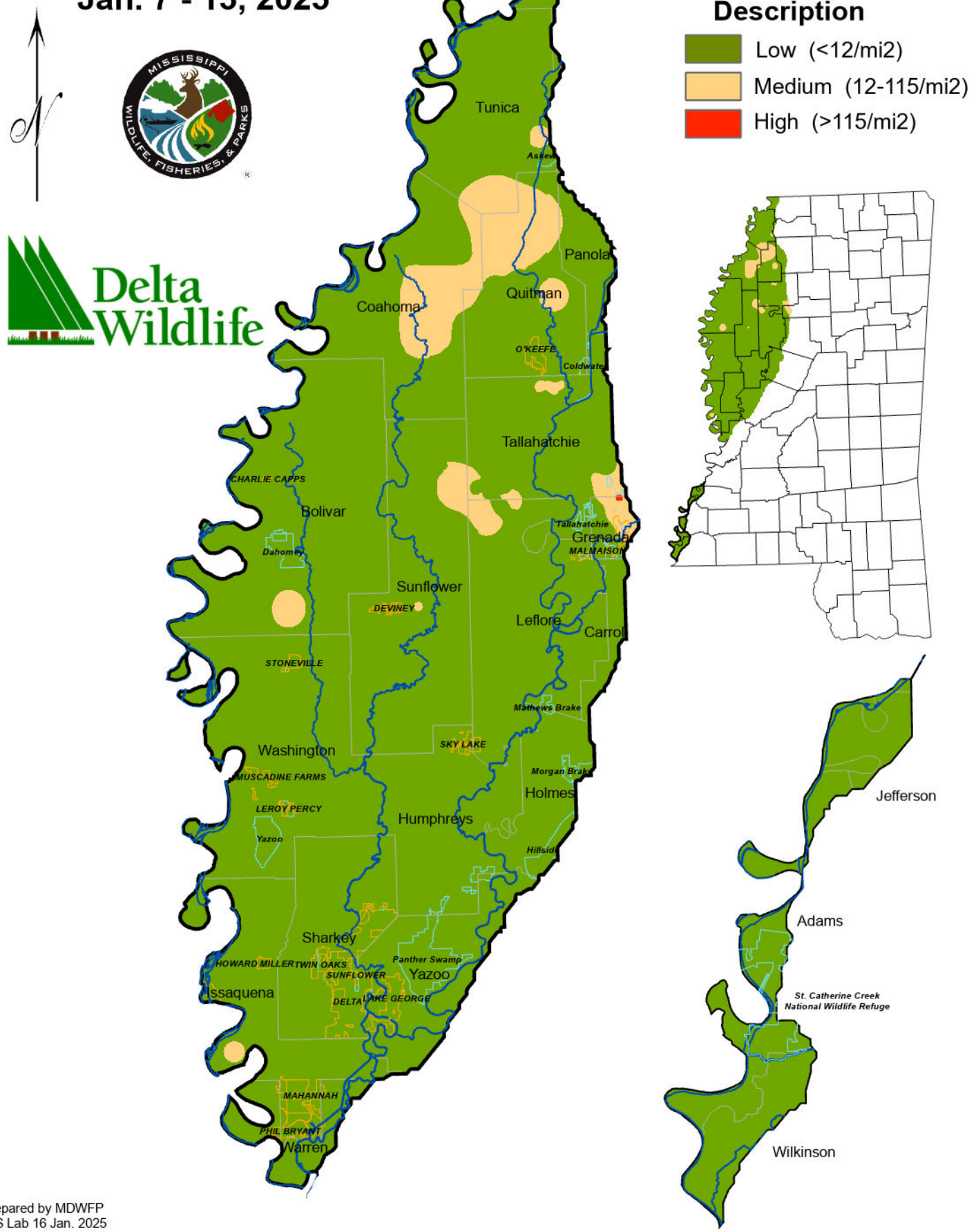
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2025



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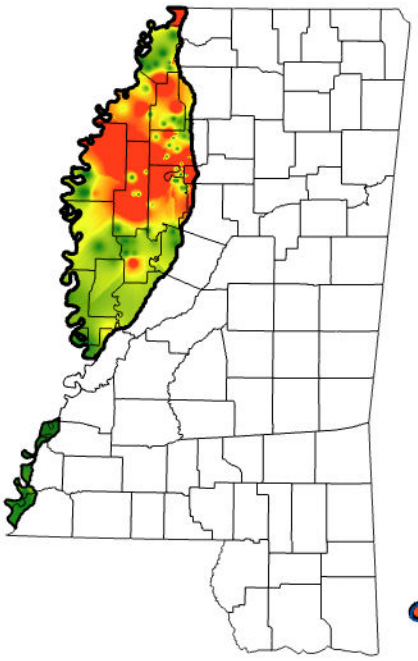
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2025



Description

Lower

Higher

Tunica
Panola
Quitman
Coahoma
Tallahatchie
Bolivar
Sunflower
Leflore
Carroll
Washington
Holmes
Humphreys
Sharkey
Yazoo
Issaquena
Warren
Jefferson
Adams
Wilkinson

CHARLIE CAPPS
Dahomey
DEVINEY
STONEVILLE
MUSCADINE FARMS
LEROY PERCY
Yazoo
SKY LAKE
Mathews Brake
Morgan Brake
Hillside
St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge
HOWARD MILLER
TWIN OAKS
SUNFLOWER
DELTA
LAKE GEORGE
Panther Swamp
MAHANNAH
PHIL BRYANT

Delta Wildlife

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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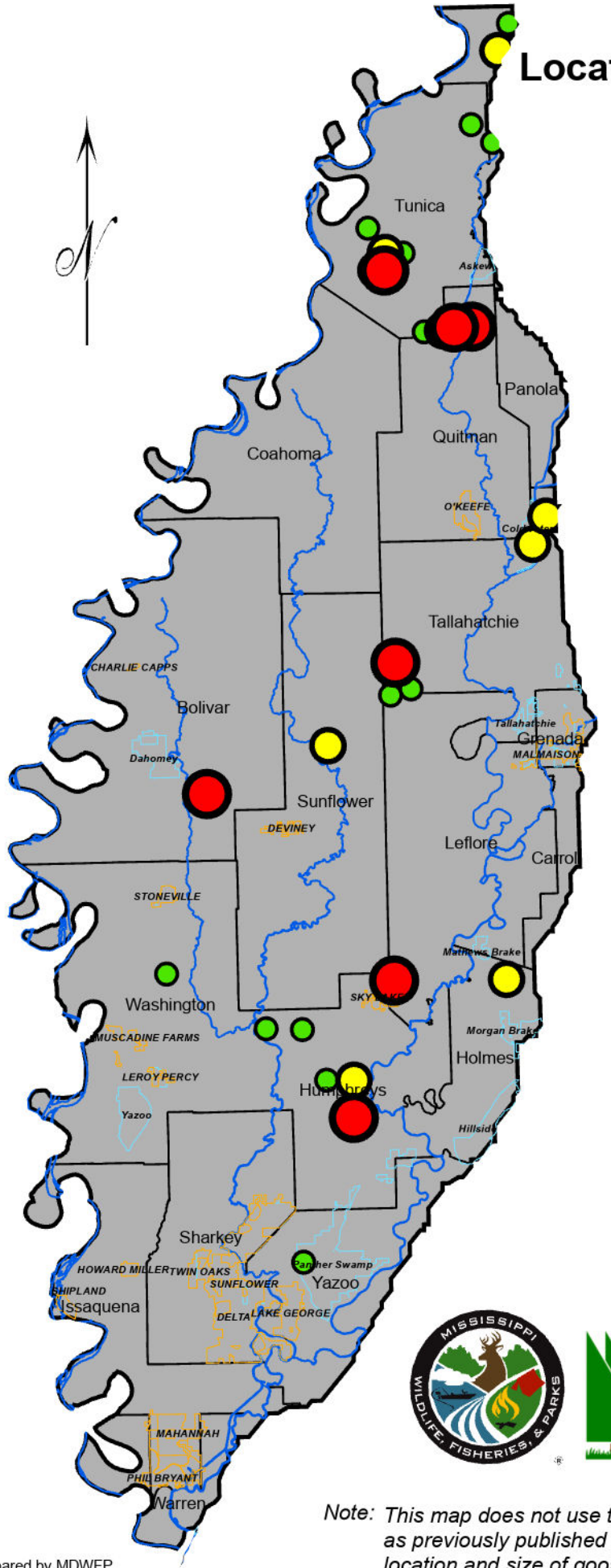
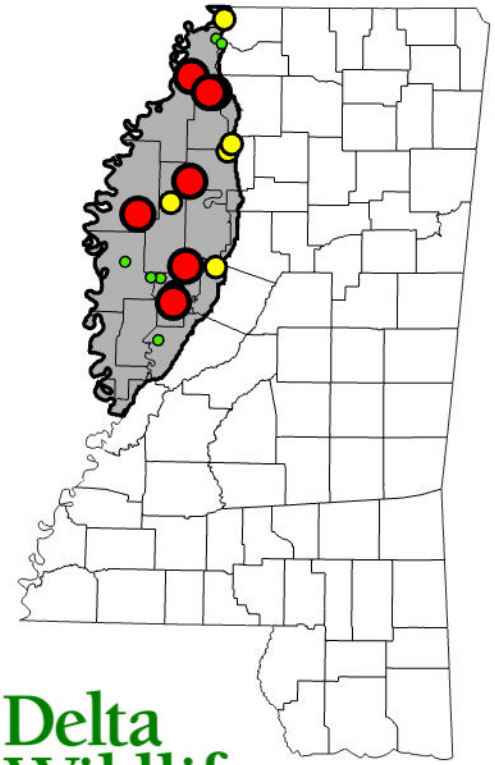
Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2025



Description

Lower

Higher



Note: *This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate location and size of goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta.*

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