



# MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 11 - 14, 2023



## WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The second MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season was completed over the span of December 11 – 14. Widespread drought continues to be the dominant factor driving waterfowl abundance and distribution across the Mississippi Delta region. Wetland habitat availability saw a slight increase since November, as much of the Mississippi Delta received some much needed rainfall recently. However, overall wetland habitat availability is still far below average for this time of year. A common observation during this survey was the evidence of managed wetlands and other low-lying areas having soaked up much of the water that had been recently pumped for flooding. Also 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 northeast portion of the Delta and was least in the northwest and southwest regions.

Although duck numbers increased from the November survey, the total duck abundance estimate for the Mississippi Delta was well below the long-term average for December surveys, as were the individual category estimates for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks (Tables 1 and 2). Early season waterfowl harvest has been good on some managed public and private lands, but hunting success has begun to slow down with a lack of significant winter weather from the north. Dabbling ducks other than mallards made up about 68% of all duck observations, with high numbers of northern shovelers, gadwall, and green-winged teal. Overall, northern shovelers and scaup were the two most abundant duck species observed, largely due to their high use of aquaculture ponds throughout the Delta. And while their overall numbers were not high compared to other species, multiple observations of canvasbacks or “the king of ducks” were recorded during this survey, as they were last December. The northeast portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of mallards, but mallard numbers were fairly evenly distributed across all regions.

Mallards were most observed using flooded agricultural fields, while other dabbling ducks and diving ducks were recorded heavily using semi-permanent and permanent wetlands like oxbows and brakes. Hunters should prepare to be adaptive (in both locations and timing of hunts) in order to continue early season hunting success until more favorable winter weather causes continued migration of waterfowl into southern states. Biologists anticipate that ducks will mostly “sit tight” during upcoming forecasted mild weather conditions to avoid hunting pressure, but should increase feeding and activity in general during periods of colder temperatures. Being selective with days afield this time of year can make a big difference in hunting success.

The majority of Mississippi’s waterfowl hunting season remains ahead, and peak numbers of waterfowl are typically observed during the month of January. Weekly waterfowl reports have begun and will continue to include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as updated weather and wetland habitat conditions. For these weekly reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl> and follow MDWFP on our social media platforms.

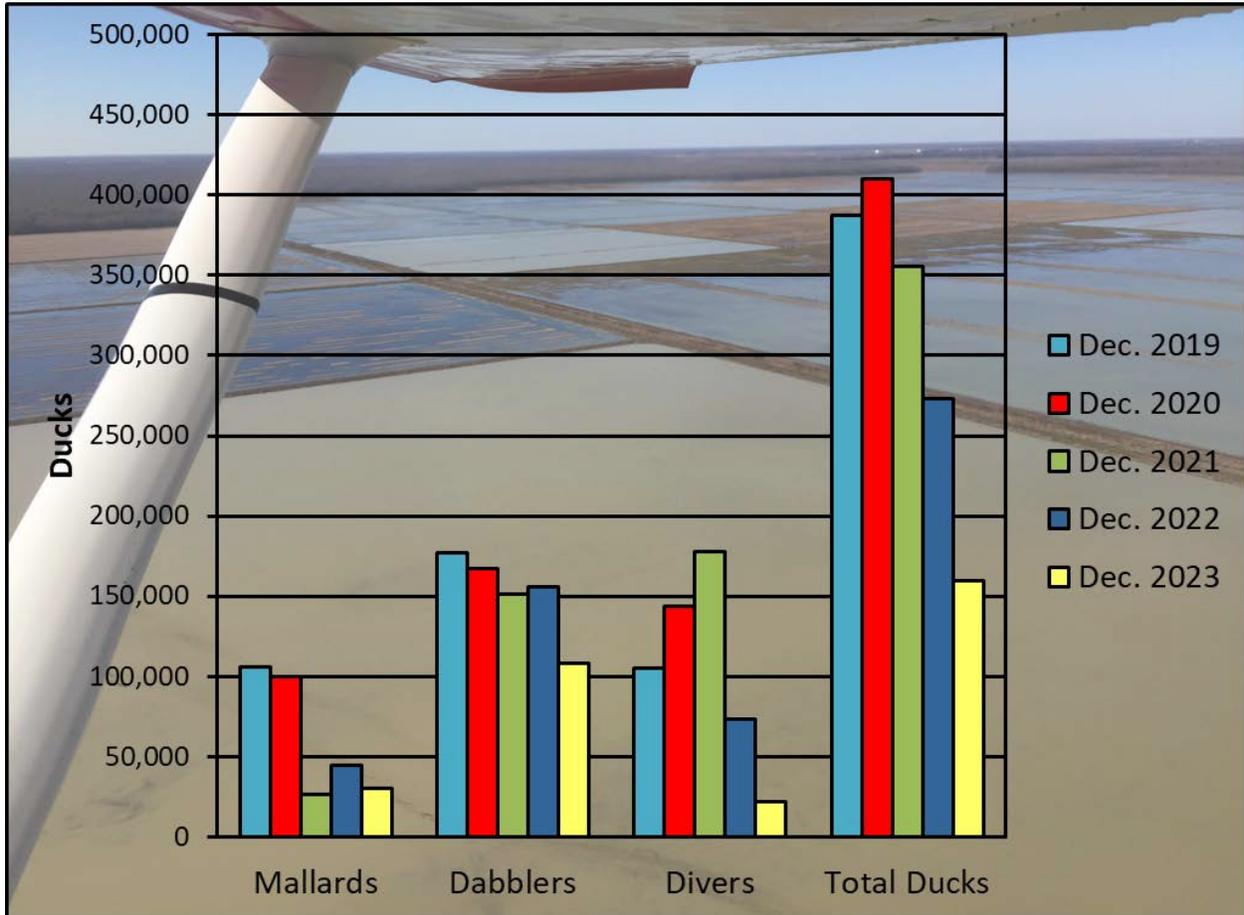
**Table 1.** Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey periods, 2007-2023.

	<b>Mallards</b>	<b>Dabblers</b>	<b>Divers</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
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
<b>Average</b>	<b>118,312</b>	<b>261,640</b>	<b>118,820</b>	<b>498,773</b>

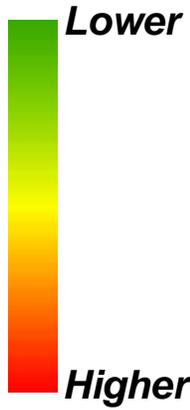
**Table 2.** Comparison of December 2023 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for December survey estimates.

Species Group	December 2022	December LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	29,753	118,313	-74.8%
Other Dabblers	108,173	261,640	-58.7%
Diving Ducks	21,809	118,820	-81.6%
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>159,735</b>	<b>498,773</b>	<b>-68.0%</b>

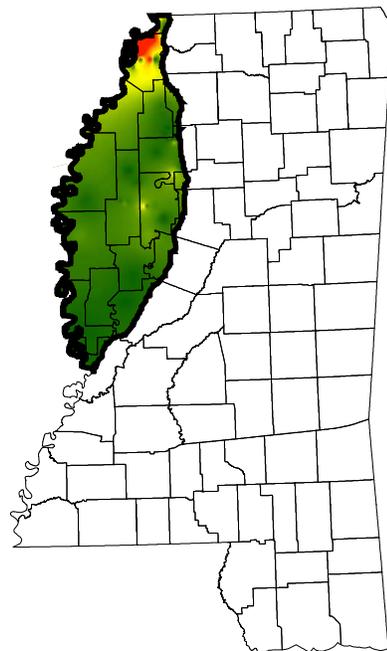
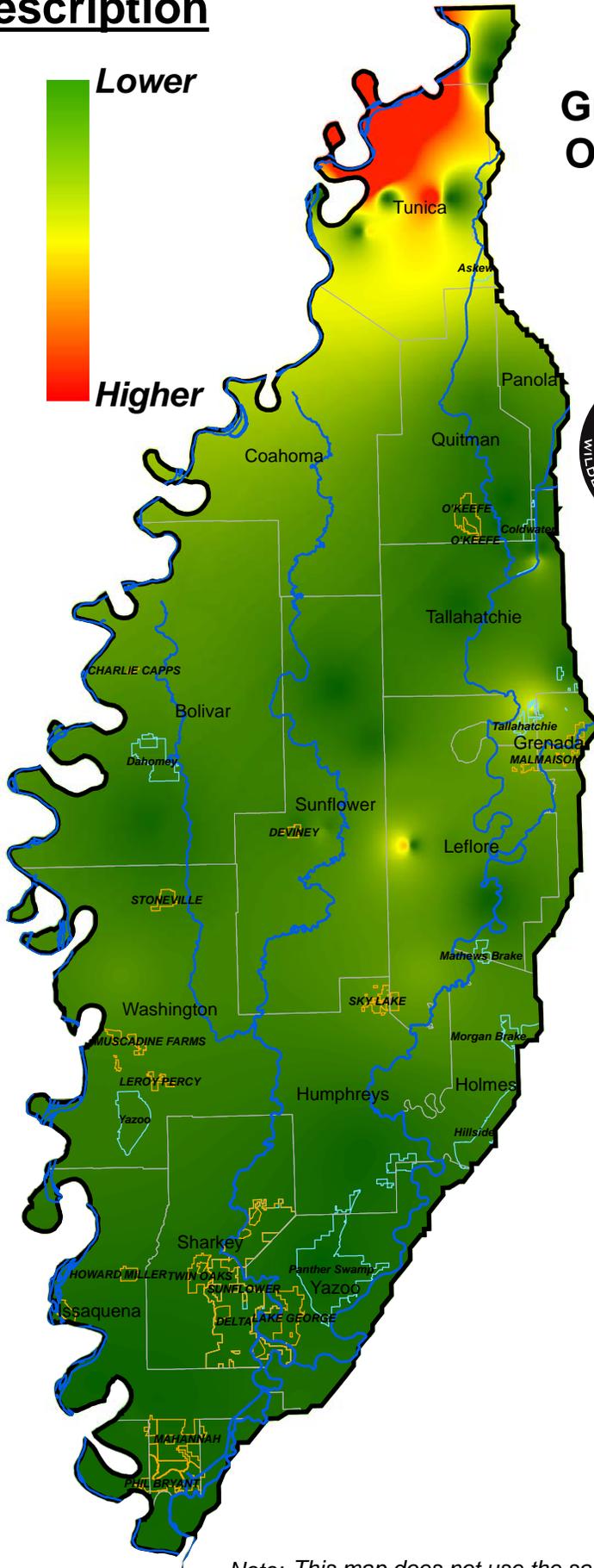
**Figure 1.** Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the five most recent December survey periods.



# Description



## Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 11 -14, 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.*

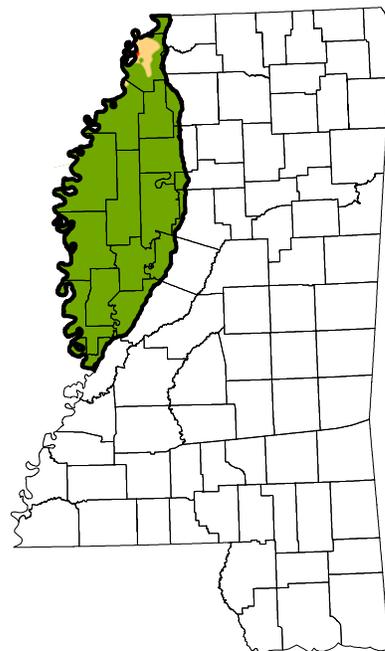
# Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

## Dec. 11 -14, 2023



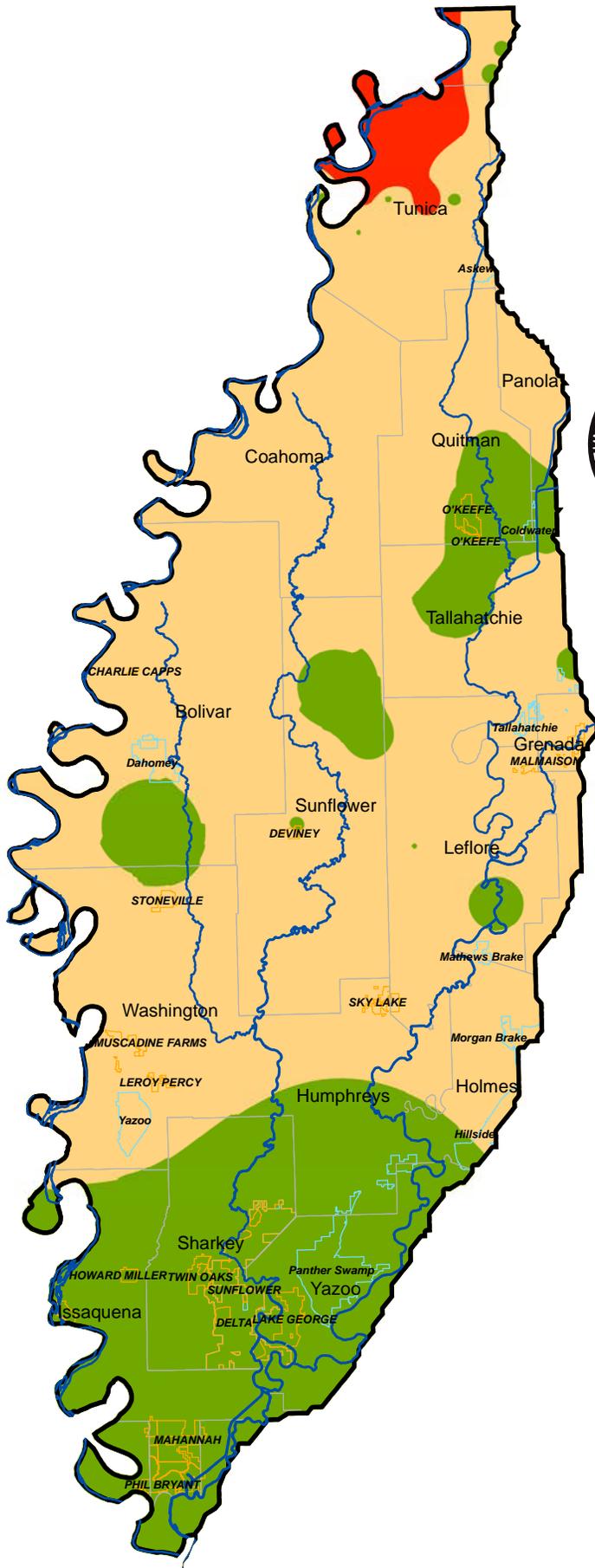
### Description

- Low (<12/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- Medium (12-115/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- High (>115/mi<sup>2</sup>)



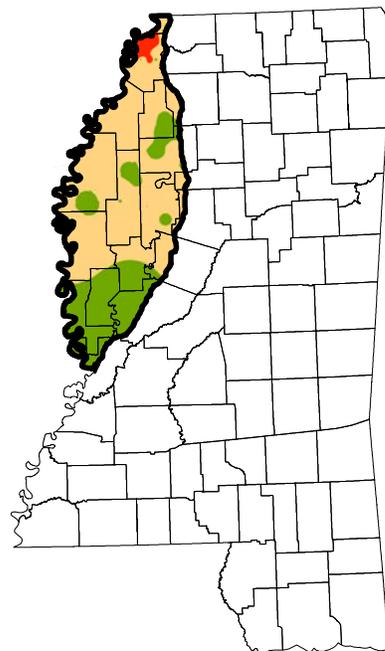
# Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

## Dec. 11 -14, 2023



### Description

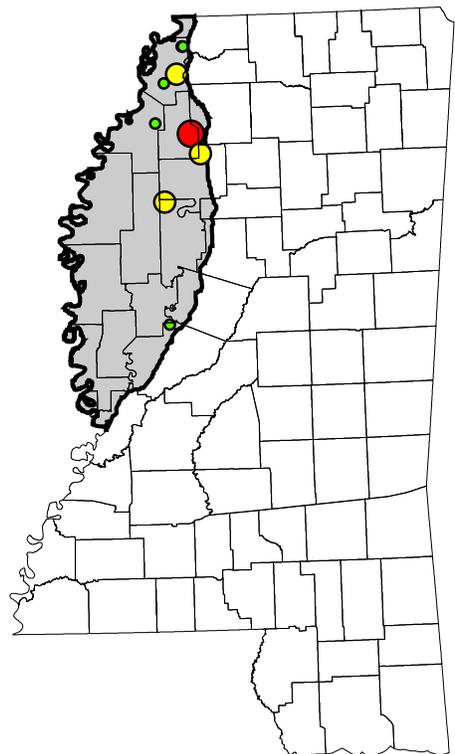
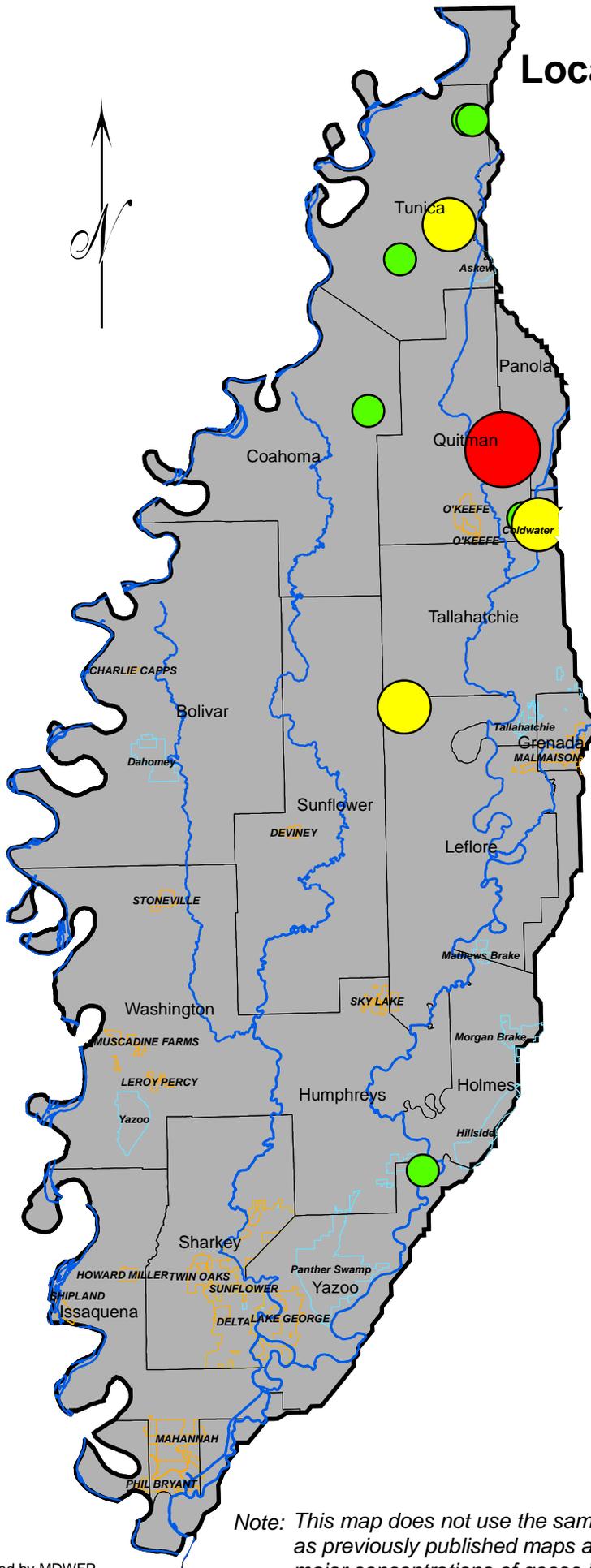
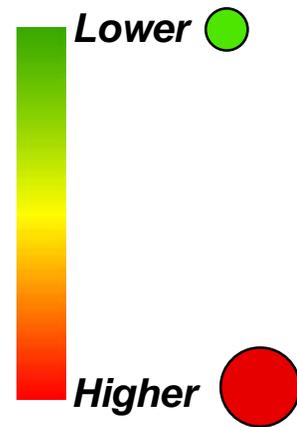
- Low (<12/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- Medium (12-115/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- High (>115/mi<sup>2</sup>)



# Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 11 - 14, 2023



## 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.*