MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 9 - 13, 2020

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The early January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of January 9 – 13, 2020. Continuing to build upon the already wet fall and winter conditions, wetland habitat availability remained well above the levels typically observed for this time of year in the Mississippi Delta. Flooded habitat was readily available in most regions of the Mississippi Delta, especially in the Yazoo backwater area in the South Delta and the lands between the Mississippi River levees. The high water in the Mississippi River is currently providing significant waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities. Most drainages, creeks, and rivers in the interior Delta have high water levels and "natural" over-bank flooding was observed in many areas due to recent rainfall.

Continuing this season's trend, duck abundance estimates increased since our last survey, but were lower than several recent years' early January estimates in the Mississippi Delta region (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabblers, divers, and total ducks remained lower than their long-term averages for the early January period (Table 2). However, dabblers other than mallards increased significantly since the December survey, and comprised about 60% of all duck observations, which is typical for this time of year in Mississippi. Mallards were the most abundant duck species observed overall, followed by gadwall and green-winged teal. Scaup and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively.

Recent mild weather combined with abundant rainfall over the last few weeks has resulted in unfavorable conditions for large migration events from northern latitudes. However, the extended forecast predicts a return of more seasonable temperatures over the weekend and lasting into next week. Biologists and managers remain optimistic that upcoming weather could provide an increase in waterfowl numbers for Mississippi before the hunting season ends.

The northeastern region of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards but was closely followed by the northwestern region. The greatest abundances of other dabbling ducks, diving ducks, and total ducks overall were also observed in the northeastern region. Mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed primarily using flooded agricultural fields, followed by moist-soil wetlands with natural vegetation. As usual, most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes. However, since many fields and other low-lying areas are currently holding deeper water than usual, this may have had caused a dispersal of diving ducks across the landscape. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where large complexes of wetland habitat were available.

Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross' geese) were observed during the early January survey. Light geese were especially abundant in the northern half of the Delta. However, large flocks were also observed moving into the central and southern regions of the Delta, and geese have generally become more widely distributed since the December survey. Large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were again observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

The remainder of the regular duck and goose hunting seasons for Mississippi will continue through January 31, 2020. 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 early January survey periods, 2008-2020.

Year	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2007-08	204,322	248,542	74,342	527,205
2008-09	191,236	278,601	66,691	536,529
2009-10	281,622	440,314	170,797	892,734
2010-11	197,319	352,858	120,700	670,878
2011-12	215,268	339,908	100,202	655,379
2012-13	131,930	263,852	70,775	448,586
2013-14	313,851	742,182	191,888	1,244,714
2014-15	145,153	364,349	74,502	584,004
2015-16	213,759	210,159	109,414	521,662
2016-17	678,235	620,432	143,739	1,442,406
2017-18	484,121	595,303	49,488	1,128,912
2018-19	111,787	186,633	69,791	368,211
2019-20	173,834	367,714	58,875	600,423
Average	**257,111**	**385,450**	**100,093**	**740,126**

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

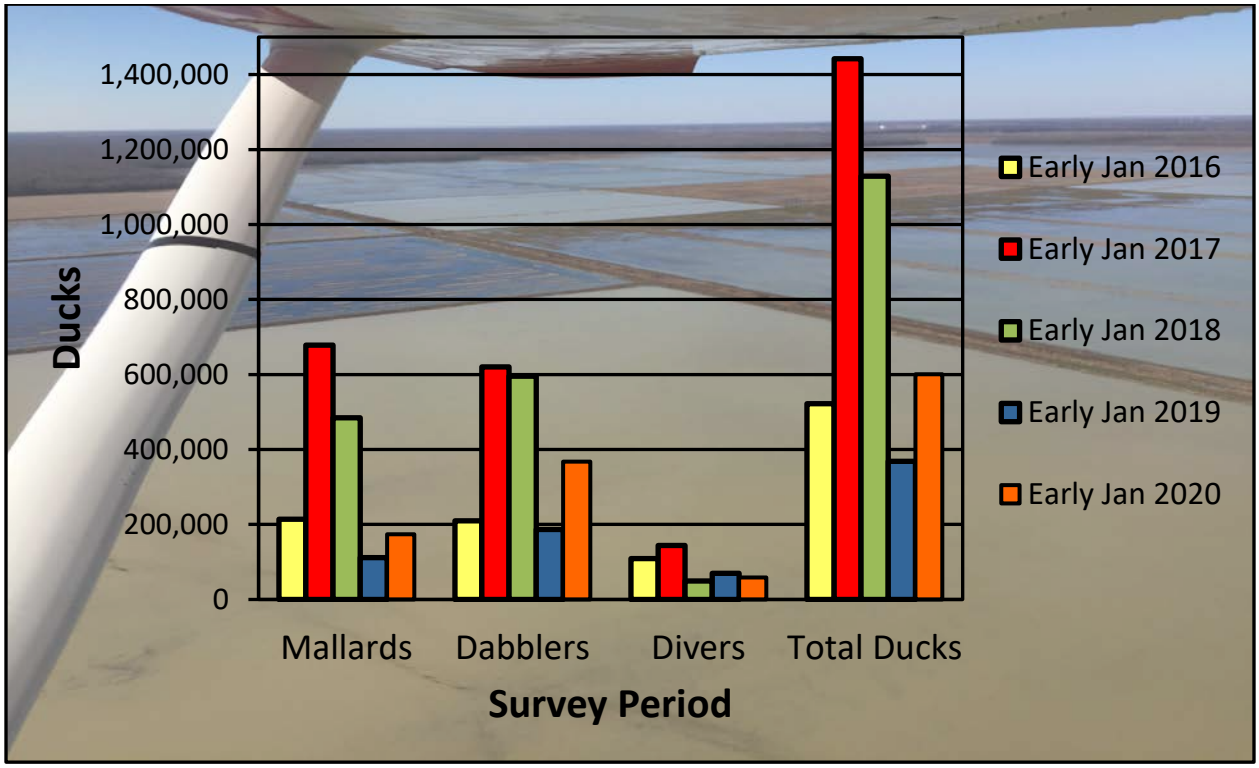
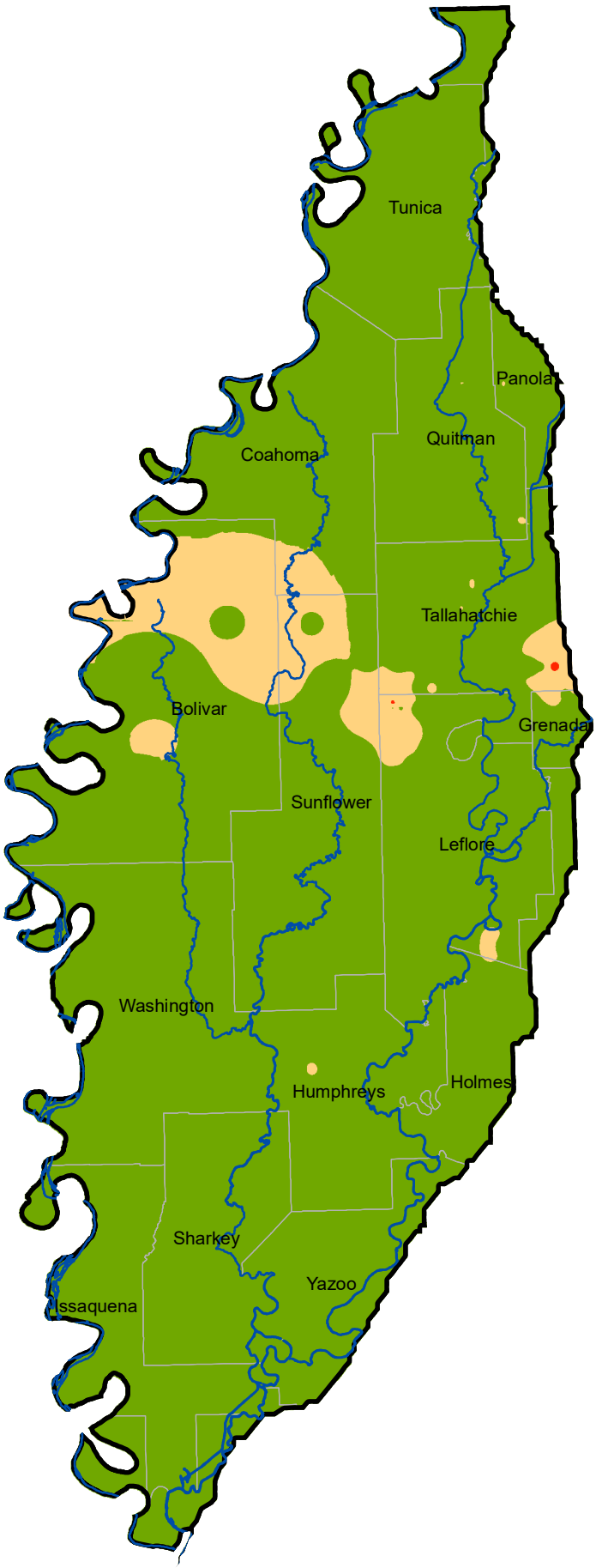


Table 2. Comparison of early January 2020 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for early January survey estimates.

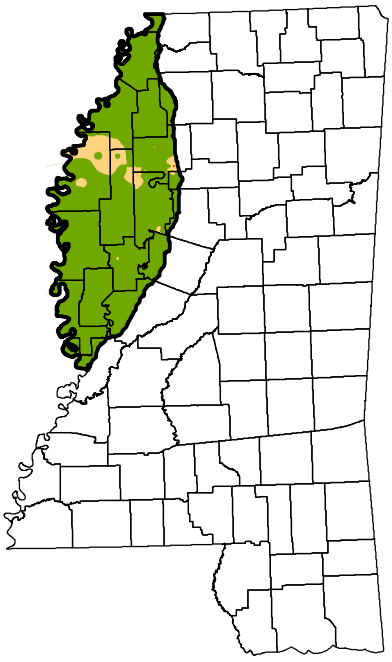
Species Group	Early January 2020	Early January LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	173,834	257,111	-32.3%
Other Dabblers	367,714	385,450	-4.6%
Diving Ducks	58,875	100,093	-41.2%
Total Ducks	600,423	740,126	-18.9%

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2020



Description

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



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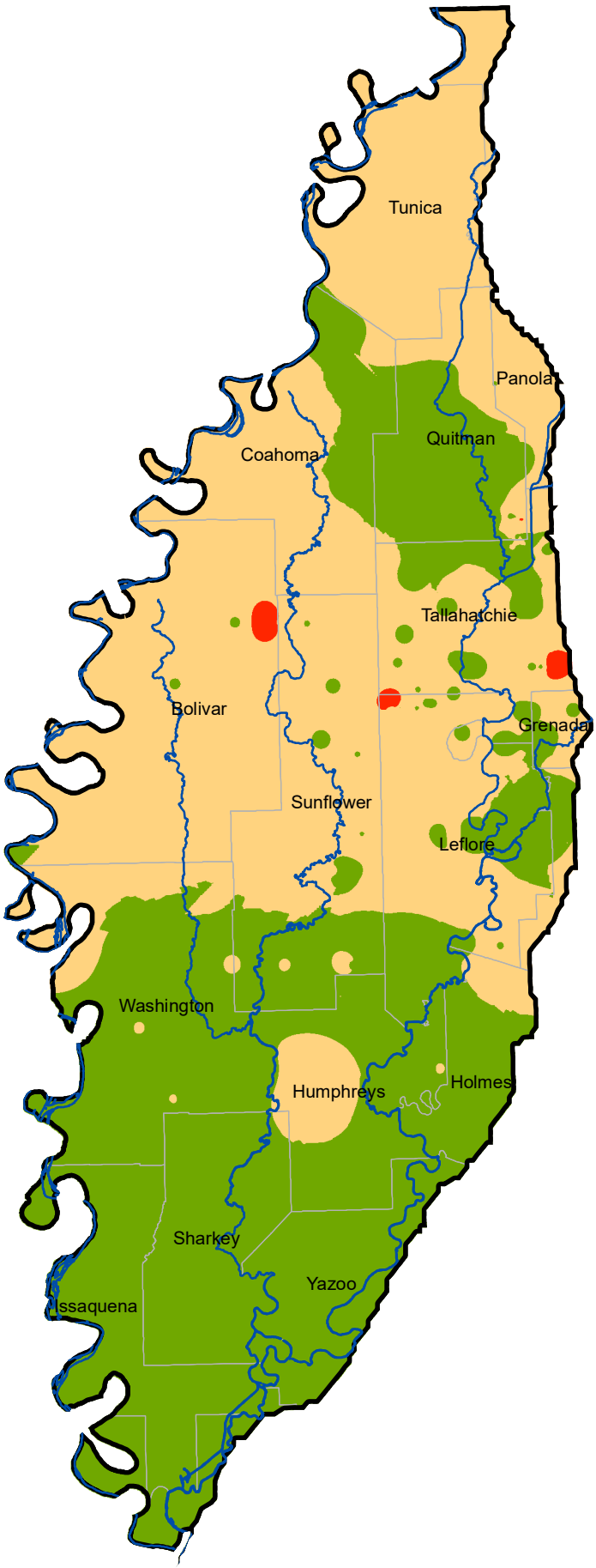
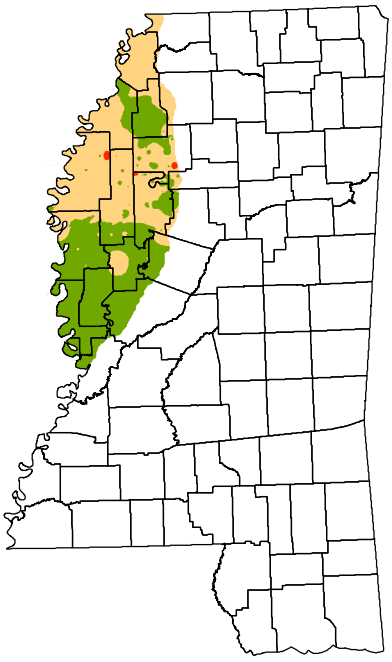
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2020



Description

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



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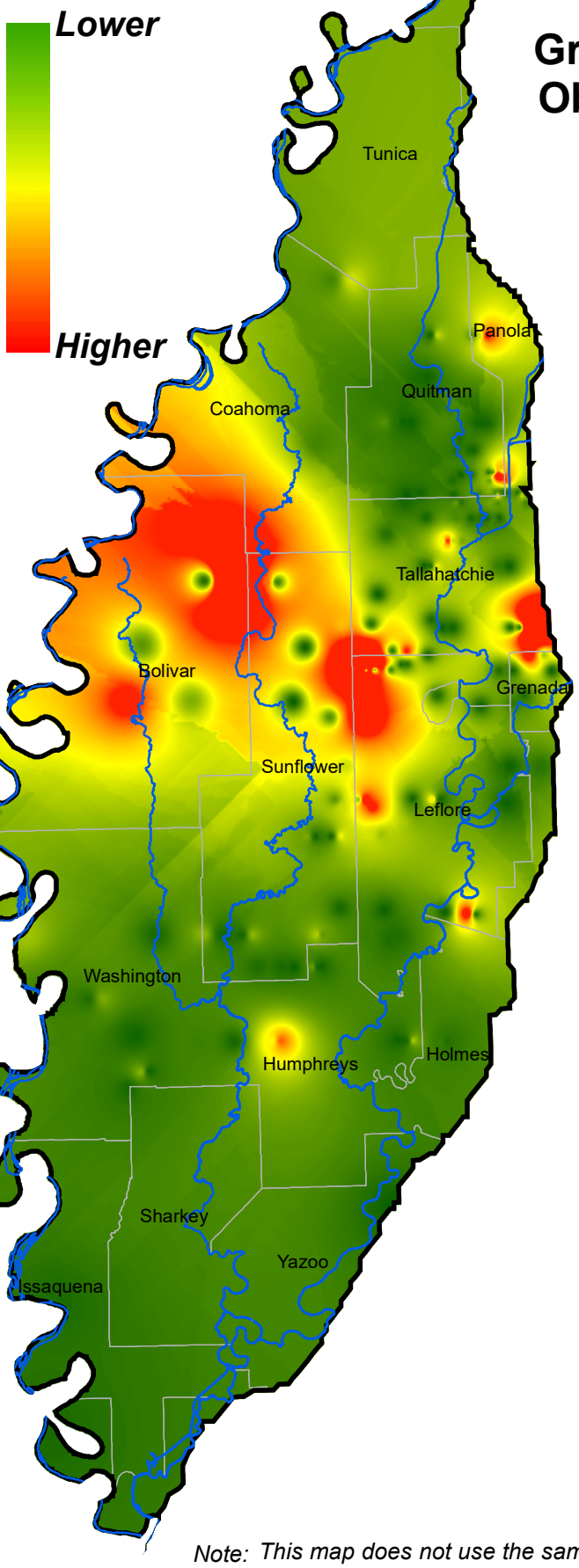
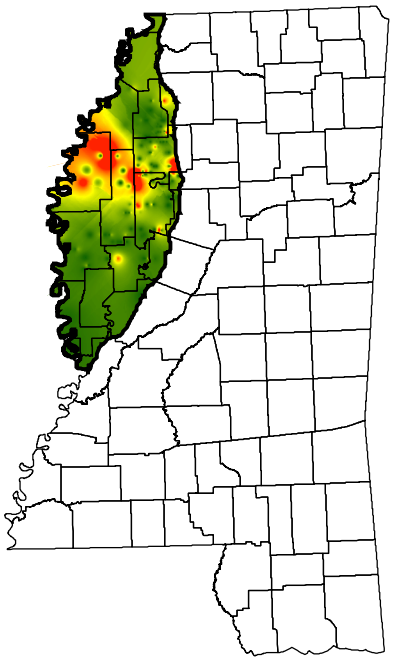


Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2020



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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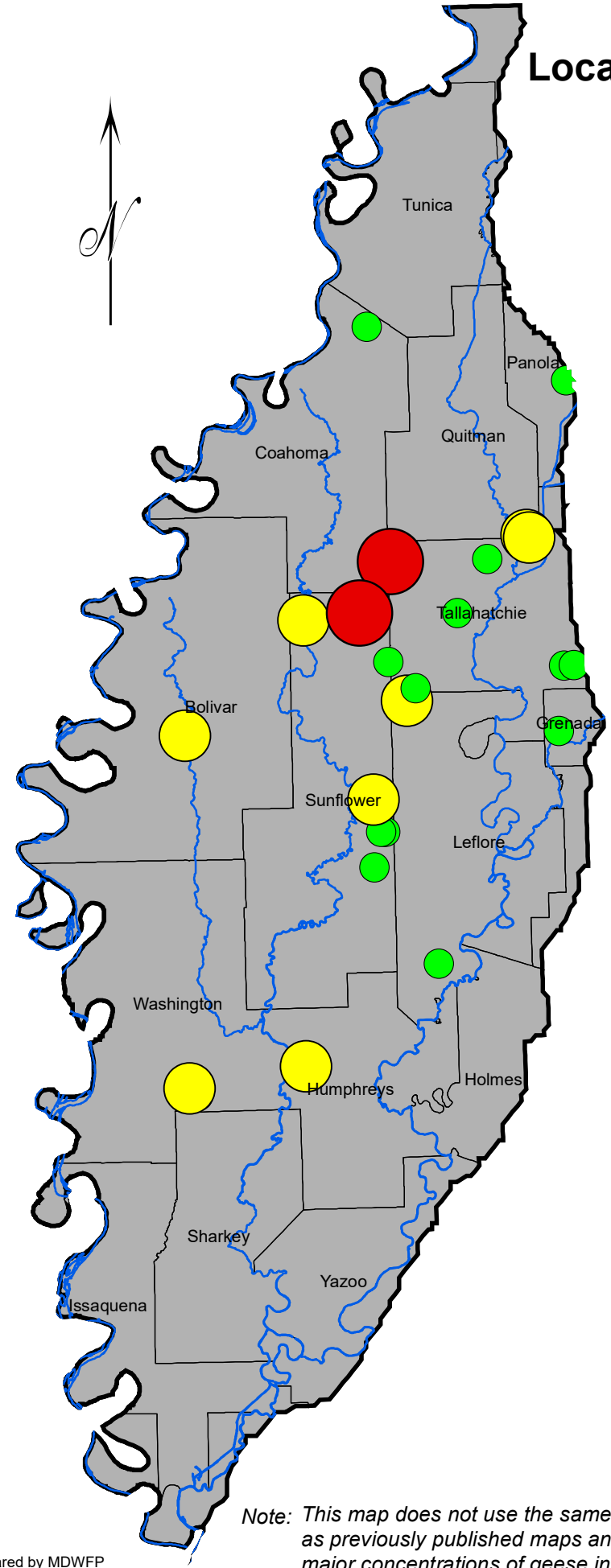
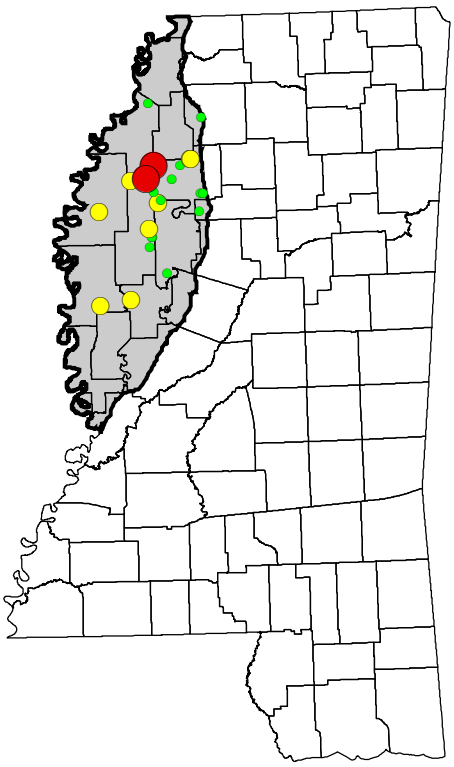
Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 7 - 13, 2020



Description

Lower

Higher



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.

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