



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 3 - 6, 2018



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The early January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of January 3 – 6. Although wetland habitat had increased since previous survey periods, a hard freeze coincided with this survey, leaving very few managed wetlands available for waterfowl. As a result, observations of wetlands with open water were very limited across the Mississippi Delta. Public lands continued to hold the majority of intensively managed, shallowly flooded wetland habitat and waterfowl were observed responding to these areas. As in most years, number of flooded impoundments generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Mississippi Delta. However, the vast majority of open water was limited to deep water or flowing areas such as oxbow lakes and river channels.

Likely as a result of several days of freezing temperatures sweeping in from the north, duck abundance estimates were very high for this time of year and comparable to last year's early January estimate (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for all groups of ducks except divers were substantially higher than their long-term averages for early January surveys (Table 2). Similar to previous surveys, dabblers other than mallards comprised about 53% of all duck observations. However, the proportion of mallards observed was nearly 45%, which was a substantial increase from the December survey estimate. Mallards were by far the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, followed by gadwall. A decrease in diving duck observations for this survey was possibly due to the large number of catfish production facilities that were completely frozen. This greatly limited the typical habitats where diving ducks are observed during most aerial surveys in the Delta. Reports from other parts of the state indicate that diving ducks may have chosen to move onto large flood control reservoirs along the bluff hills during the freeze. Ring-necked ducks and scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. Reports from both public and private lands indicate that mallard numbers have begun to increase across much of the Mississippi Delta as ducks return to their more typical habitats seeking high energy food sources. The weather forecast for the week predicts warm weather, but with chances of much-needed rainfall for much of Mississippi. Another push of cold air from the north is then predicted to persist through the weekend and into next week.

The northeastern and southeastern portions of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of ducks overall. Mallards and other dabbling ducks were most abundant in the northeastern region. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the southwestern region.

As expected, all groups of ducks (mallards, other dabblers, and divers) were observed most commonly using "permanent water" areas such as oxbow lakes, sloughs, creeks, and rivers due to the ice coverage on most other wetland types. Ducks were highly concentrated in large numbers in fewer locations than usual due to extreme weather conditions. Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross' geese) were observed during the early January survey, particularly in the northern portions of the Delta. Also, very large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were observed using large dry agricultural fields and levees around production catfish ponds.

The remainder of the regular duck and goose hunting seasons will continue on through January 28, 2018. 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 period, 2016-2018.

Species	Survey Period		
	Early Jan 2016	Early Jan 2017	Early Jan 2018
Mallards	213,759	678,235	484,121
Other Dabblers	210,159	620,432	595,303
Diving Ducks	109,414	143,739	49,488
Total Ducks	521,662	1,442,406	1,128,912

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the early January survey period, 2016-2018.

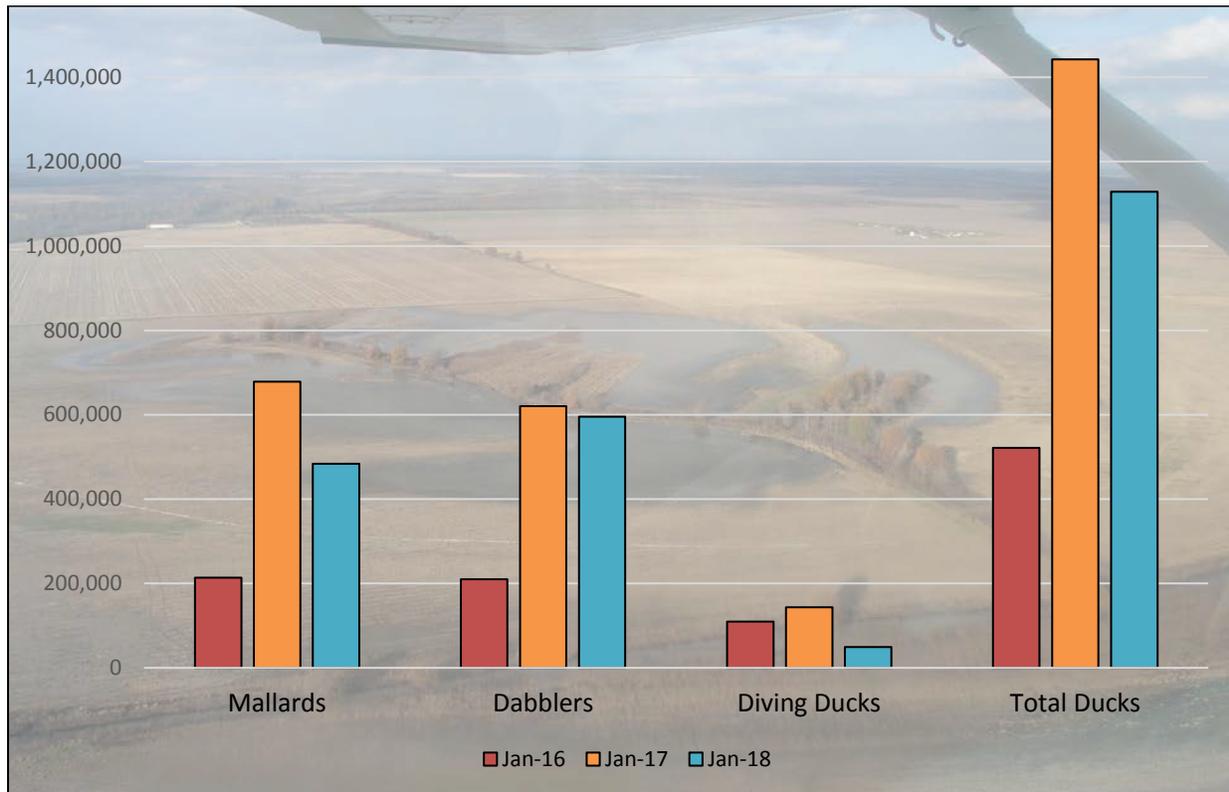


Table 2. Comparison of early January 2018 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for early January survey estimates.

Species Group	Early Jan 2018	Early Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	484,121	277,892	+74.2%
Other Dabblers	595,303	405,136	+46.9%
Diving Ducks	49,488	106,594	-53.6%
Total Ducks	1,128,912	786,637	+43.5%

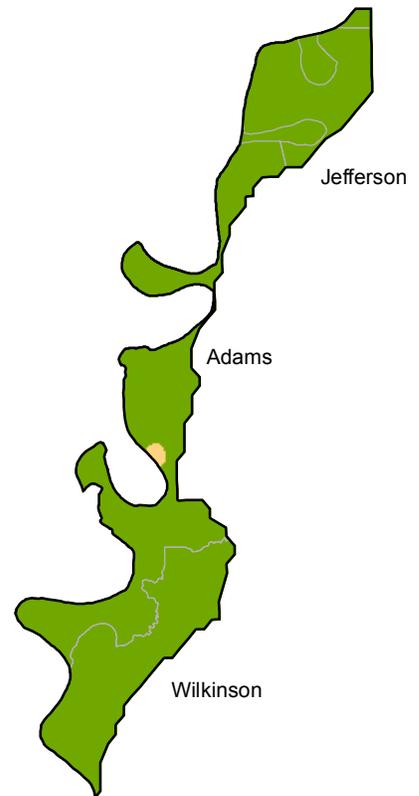
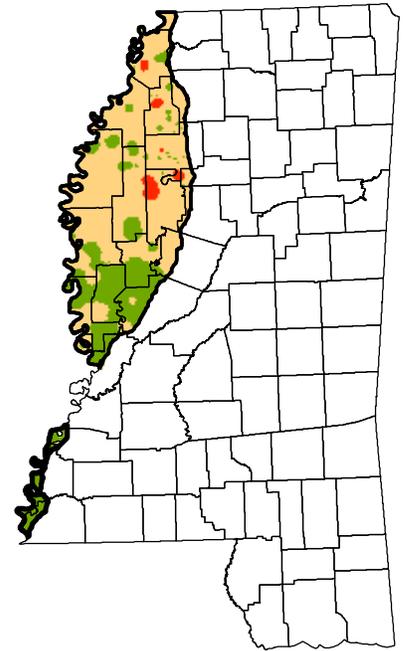
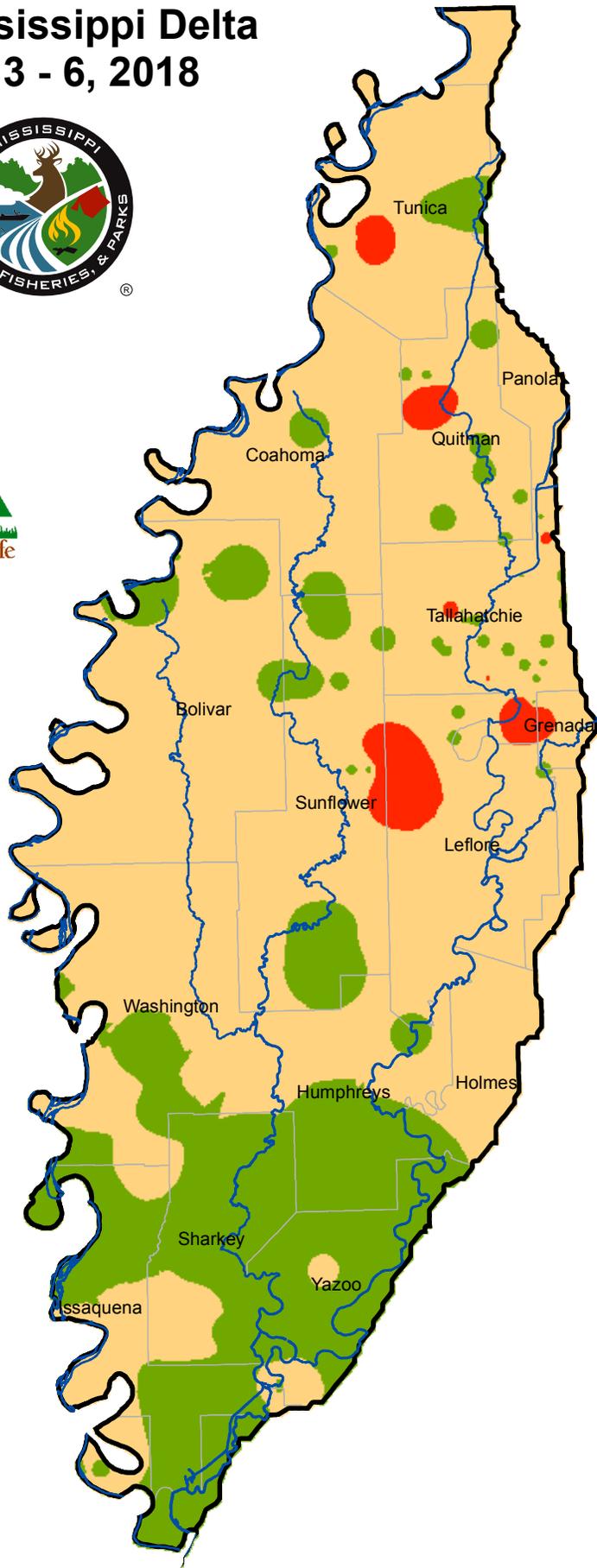
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 3 - 6, 2018



Description

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

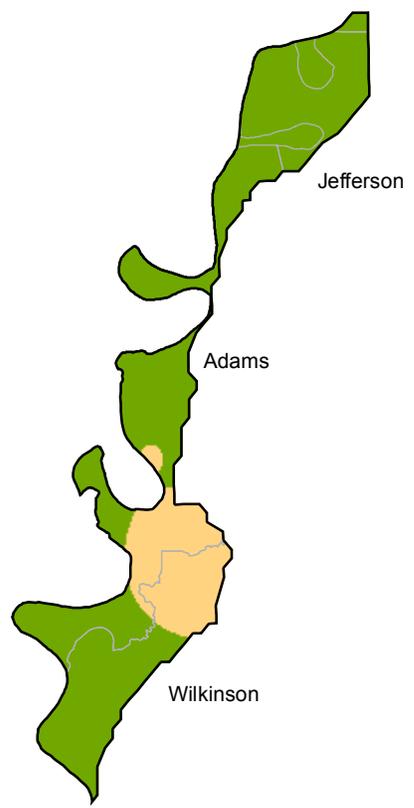
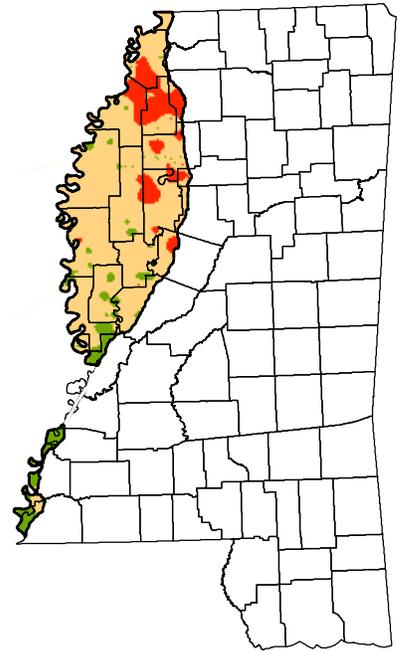
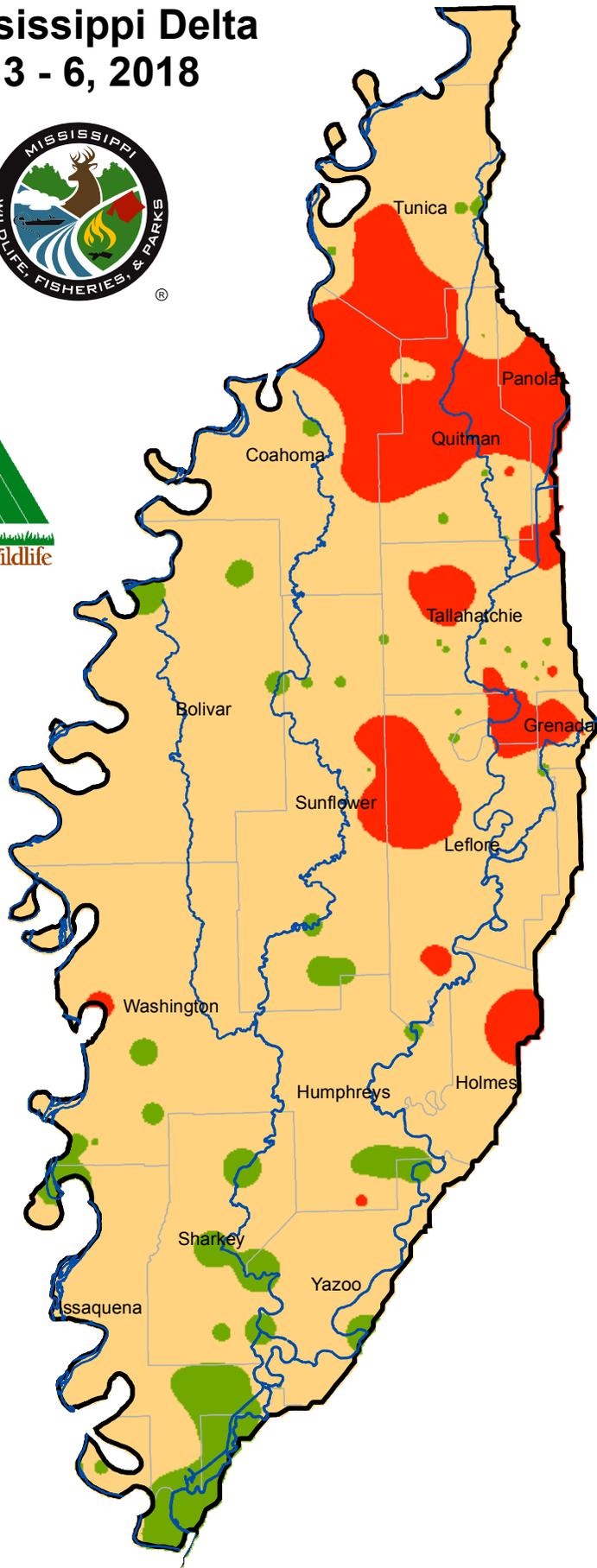


Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 3 - 6, 2018

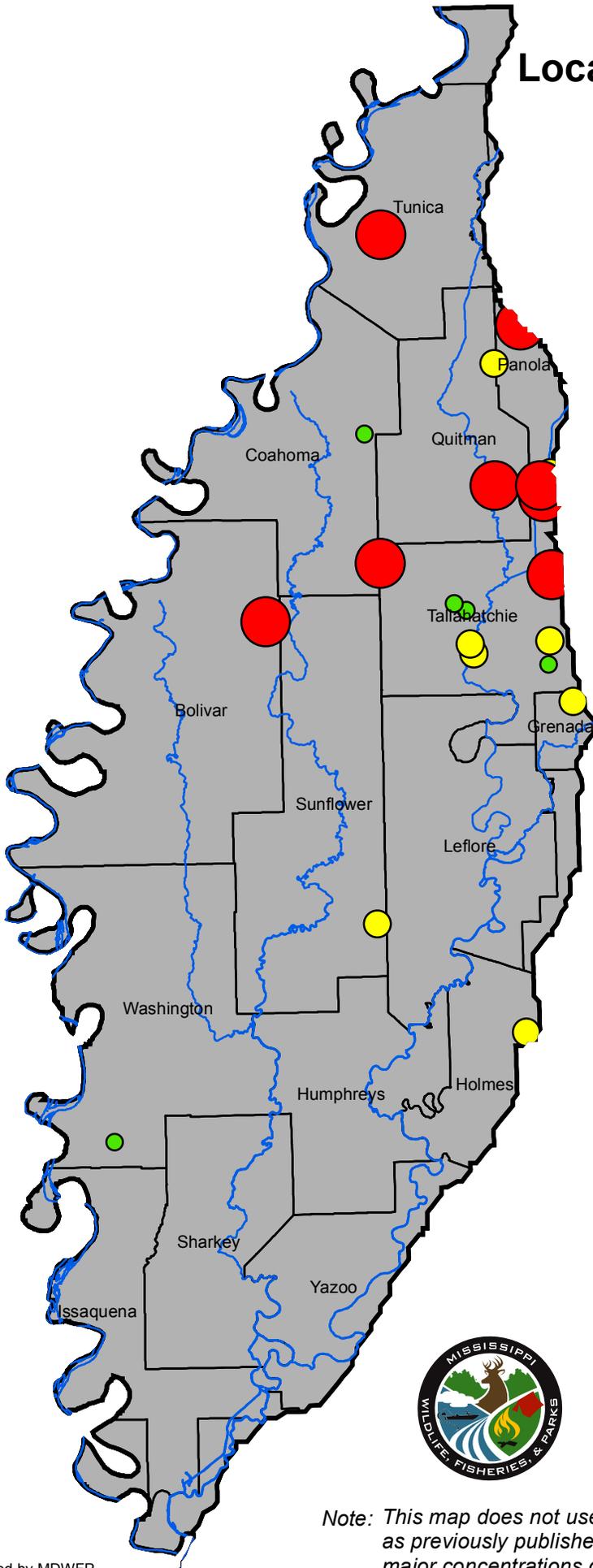


Description

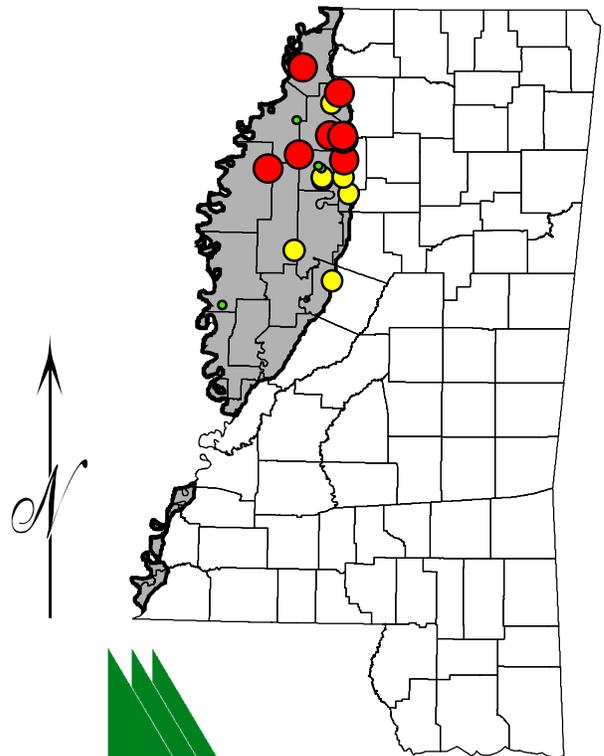
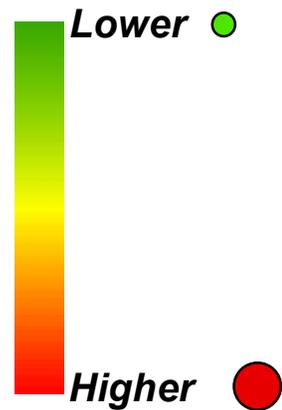
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 3- 6, 2018



Description



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.