



# MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 18 - 23, 2018



**WATERFOWL PROGRAM**

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The mid-December MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of December 18 – 23. Building upon the wet start to the hunting season in November, wetland habitat availability remained well above the “normal” levels typically observed during December surveys. Shallowly managed water was observed across much of the Mississippi Delta as a result of landowners and managers capturing recent rainfall. Due to consistent rainfall this fall, an abundance of harvested agricultural fields have been left undisturbed (not disked under), which could result in increased food availability for waterfowl if the fields are eventually flooded. As in most years, flooded habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Mississippi Delta. Water levels remained relatively high in most drainages, creeks, and rivers, but “natural” over-bank flooding was observed in very few areas.

As with the November survey, December duck abundance estimates were generally lower than recent years’ December estimates for the Mississippi Delta region (Table 1 and Figure 1). Mallard, other dabbling, and total duck estimates were lower than their long-term averages, while diving duck estimates were higher than their long-term average for December (Table 2). The neighboring states of Louisiana and Arkansas have also reported below-average duck numbers for December. Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 45% of all duck observations, which is typical for this time of year in Mississippi. Mallards were by far the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, followed by green-winged teal and northern shovelers. Scaup, ring-necked ducks, and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. The weather forecast for the week ahead predicts warm and rainy weather, with a much-needed cooling down expected by early next week. Biologists and managers are optimistic this weather could provide an increase in waterfowl numbers.

The northwestern portion of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards, while the northeastern portion contained the greatest abundances of other dabblers and total ducks overall. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the southeastern region.

Mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed most commonly using flooded agricultural fields, followed by moist-soil habitat (natural vegetation such as grasses and sedges) on intensively managed public and private lands. Most diving ducks were observed heavily using large catfish pond complexes, followed by permanent wetlands such as oxbow lakes and sloughs. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where large complexes of wetland habitat were available.

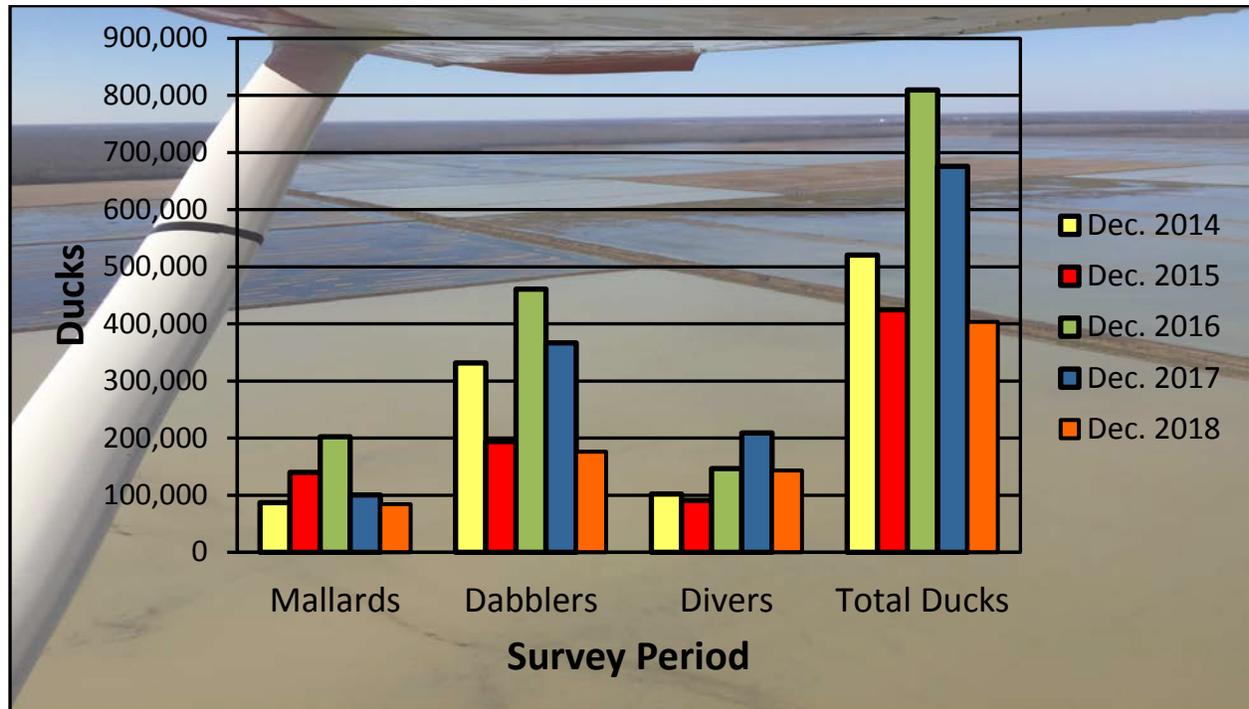
Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’ geese) were observed during the December survey, particularly in the northern portions of the Delta. Also, large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

The remainder of the regular duck and goose hunting seasons will continue on through January 27, 2019. WMA waterfowl draw hunt applications are now open for the fifth draw period of the season. Applications can be submitted at <https://xnet2.mdwfp.com/drawings/public/WmaDrawingsV3.aspx>. 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 December survey periods, 2007-2018.

	<b>Mallards</b>	<b>Dabblers</b>	<b>Divers</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
2007-08	50,368	75,604	41,738	167,710
2008-09	223,976	389,939	70,750	684,665
2009-10	116,748	209,346	74,396	400,491
2010-11	210,531	388,064	236,966	835,561
2011-12	136,776	281,560	111,423	529,758
2012-13	122,779	176,950	171,542	471,271
2013-14	230,634	638,386	100,412	969,432
2014-15	86,838	331,460	102,117	520,415
2015-16	139,805	193,719	90,958	424,482
2016-17	202,135	460,752	146,707	809,594
2017-18	100,389	366,802	208,749	675,940
2018-19	84,032	176,070	143,417	403,519
<b>Average</b>	<b>142,084</b>	<b>307,388</b>	<b>124,931</b>	<b>574,403</b>

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

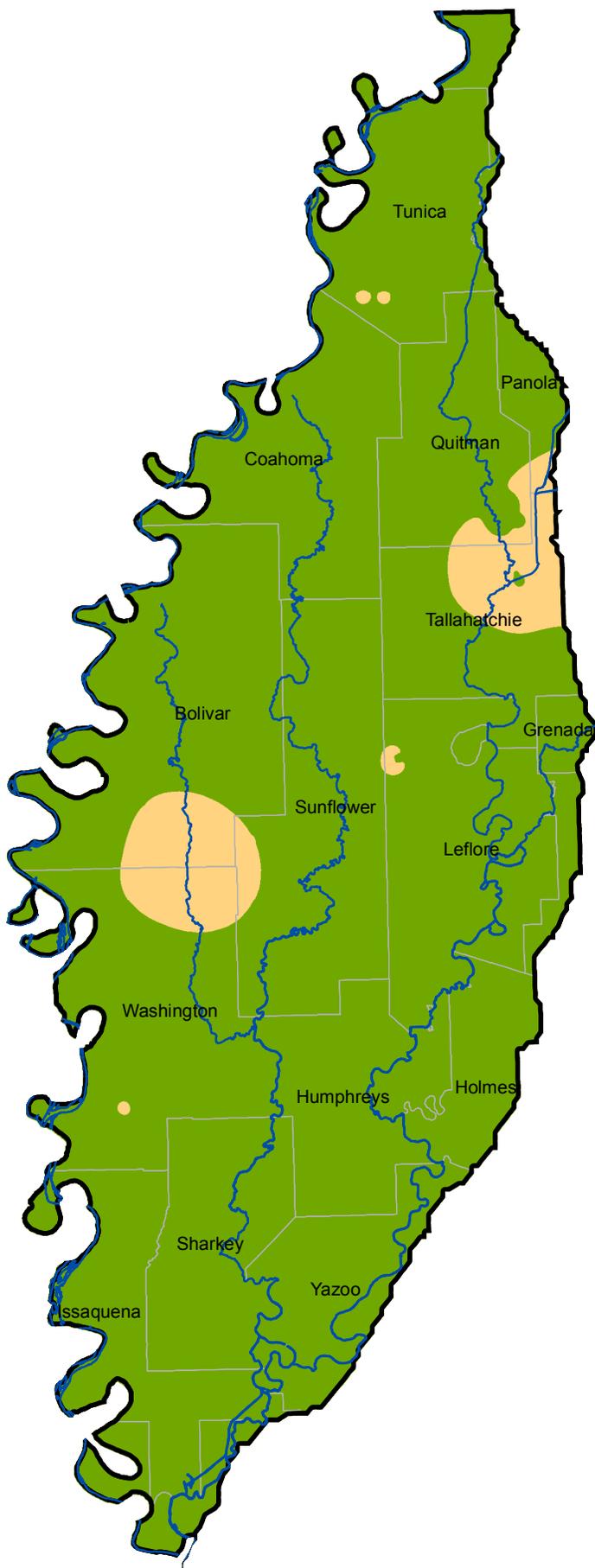


**Table 2.** Comparison of December 2018 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for December survey estimates.

Species Group	December 2018	December LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	84,032	142,084	-41.0%
Other Dabblers	176,070	307,338	-43.7%
Diving Ducks	143,417	124,931	+14.7%
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>403,519</b>	<b>574,403</b>	<b>-29.8%</b>

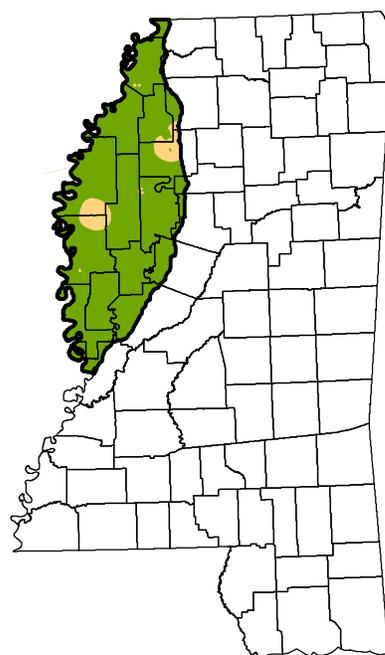
# Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

## Dec. 18-22, 2018



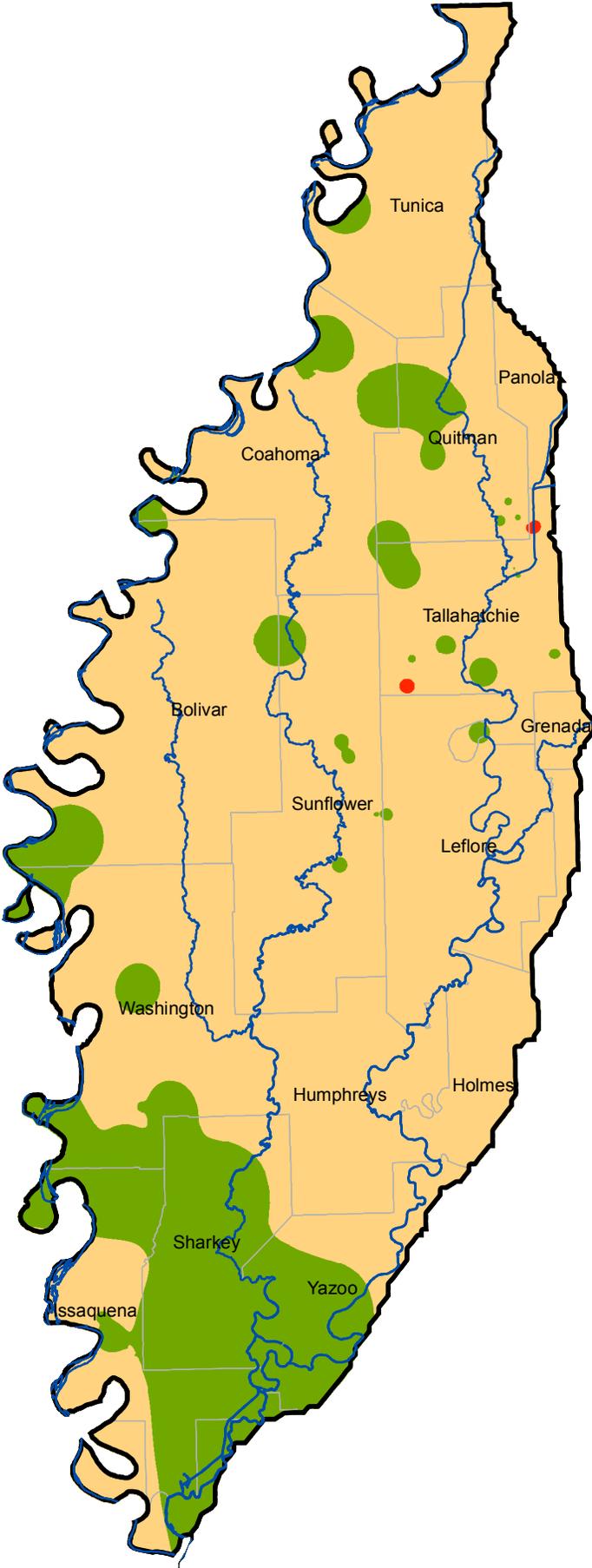
### Description

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



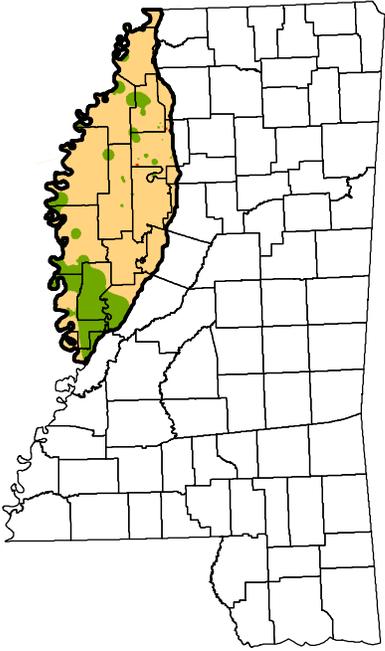
# Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

## Dec. 18-22, 2018

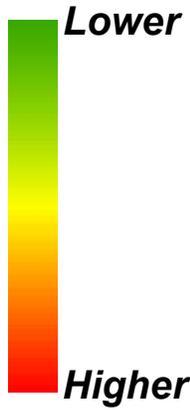


### Description

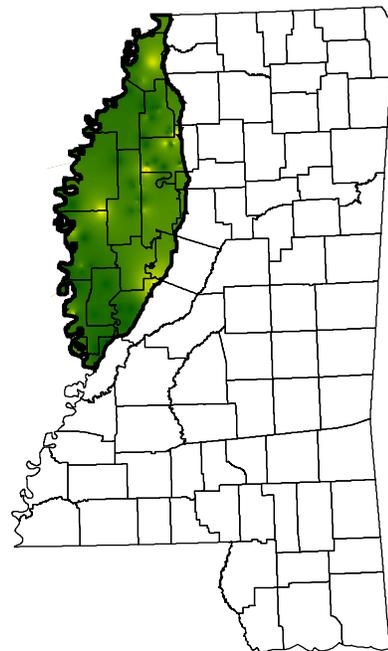
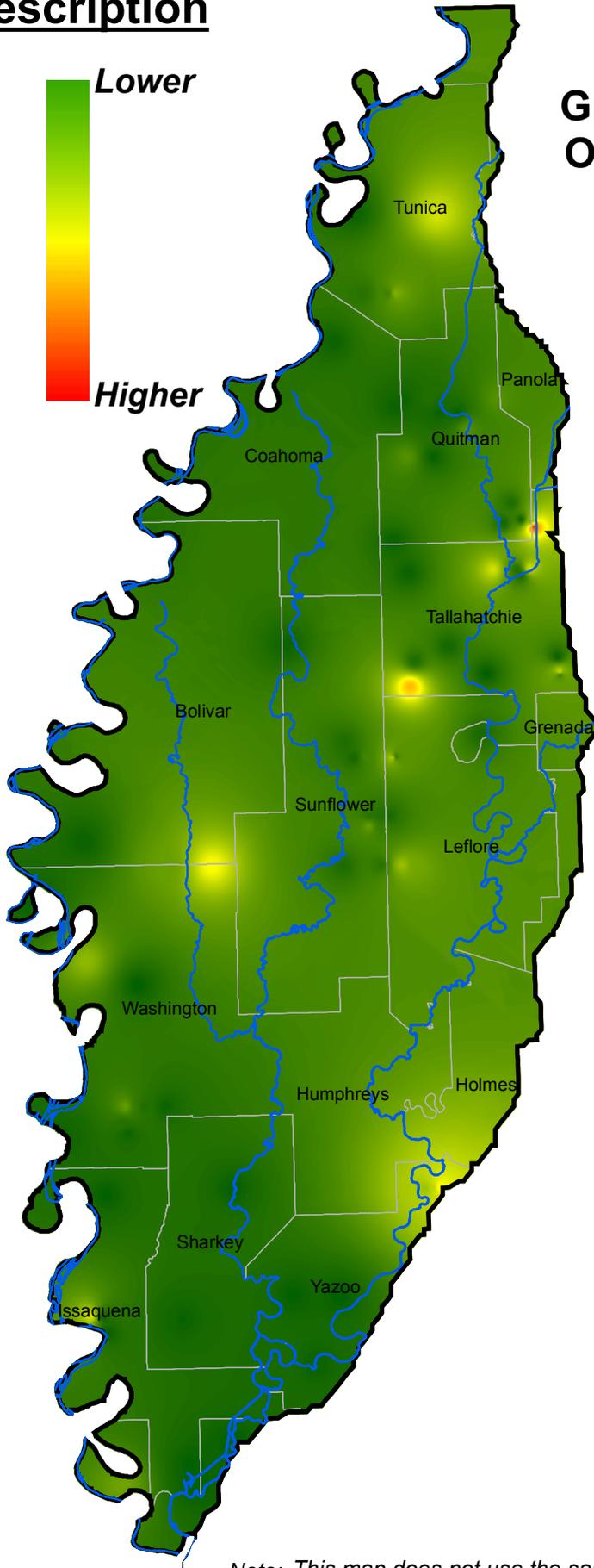
- Low (<12/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- Medium (12-115/mi<sup>2</sup>)
- High (>115/mi<sup>2</sup>)



# Description

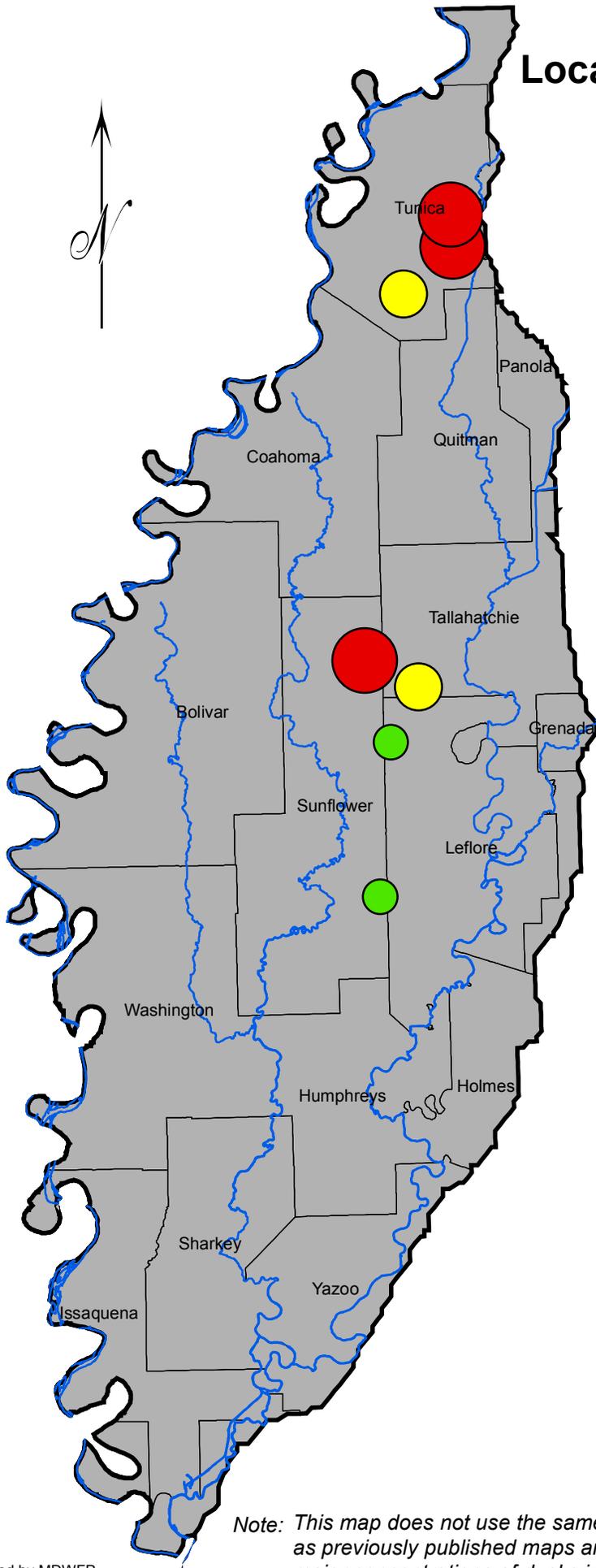


## Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 18-22, 2018

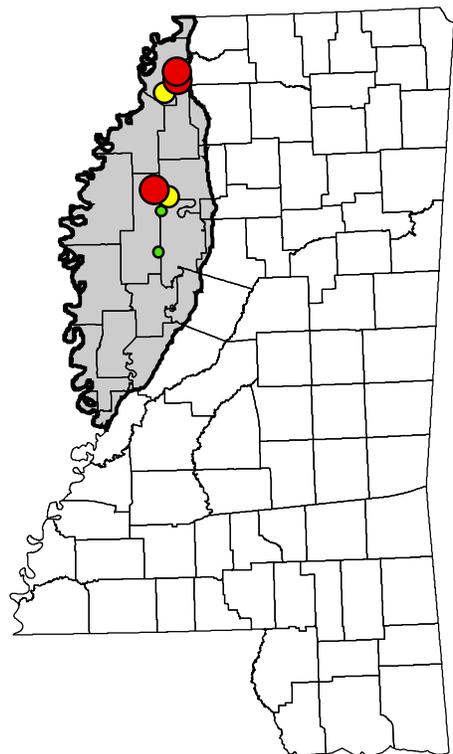
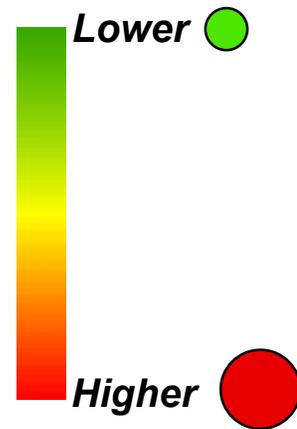


*Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.*

# Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 18-22, 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.*