



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 8 - 11, 2019



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The early January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of January 8 – 11, 2019. Continuing to build upon the already wet fall and winter conditions, wetland habitat availability remained well above the levels typically observed. Shallowly managed water was observed across much of the Mississippi Delta because of landowners and managers capturing rainfall. Due to consistent rainfall this fall, many harvested agricultural fields have been left undisturbed (not disked under). This has likely resulted in increased food resources for dry-feeding geese and for ducks when fields become flooded. 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. Water levels remained relatively high in most drainages, creeks, and rivers, and “natural” over-bank flooding was observed in many areas.

Continuing this season’s trend, early January duck abundance estimates were lower than recent years’ early January estimates in the Mississippi Delta region (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabblers, divers, and total ducks were all significantly lower than their long-term averages for the early January period (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 50% 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 lack of significant duck numbers migrating into the state is likely due to the mild weather experienced so far this winter. This weather, combined with abundant rainfall creating large expanses of open (unfrozen) wetland habitat at mid and northern latitudes, has resulted in unfavorable conditions for large migration events. This week’s forecast shows a cool start, followed by a significantly warmer and rainy end to the week. However, the extended forecast predicts a sharp decrease in temperatures over the weekend, followed by relatively cool temperatures lasting into next week. Biologists and managers are optimistic this weather, combined with snowfall in the Midwest, could provide an increase in waterfowl numbers for Mississippi before the hunting season ends.

The northeastern portion of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards, 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 extensively using flooded agricultural fields, followed by permanent water areas such as rivers and lakes. As usual, most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes. However, a high proportion of diving duck observations were also recorded in flooded agriculture fields. Since many fields are currently holding deeper water than usual, this may have had caused a wide dispersal of diving ducks. In general, the abundant habitat available across the Delta could have negatively impacted our ability to detect some large concentrations of ducks. 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 northeastern portion of the Delta, but large flocks were also observed moving into the southern regions of the Delta. 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 27, 2019. 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, 2008-2019.

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
Average	264,050	386,928	103,528	751,768

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

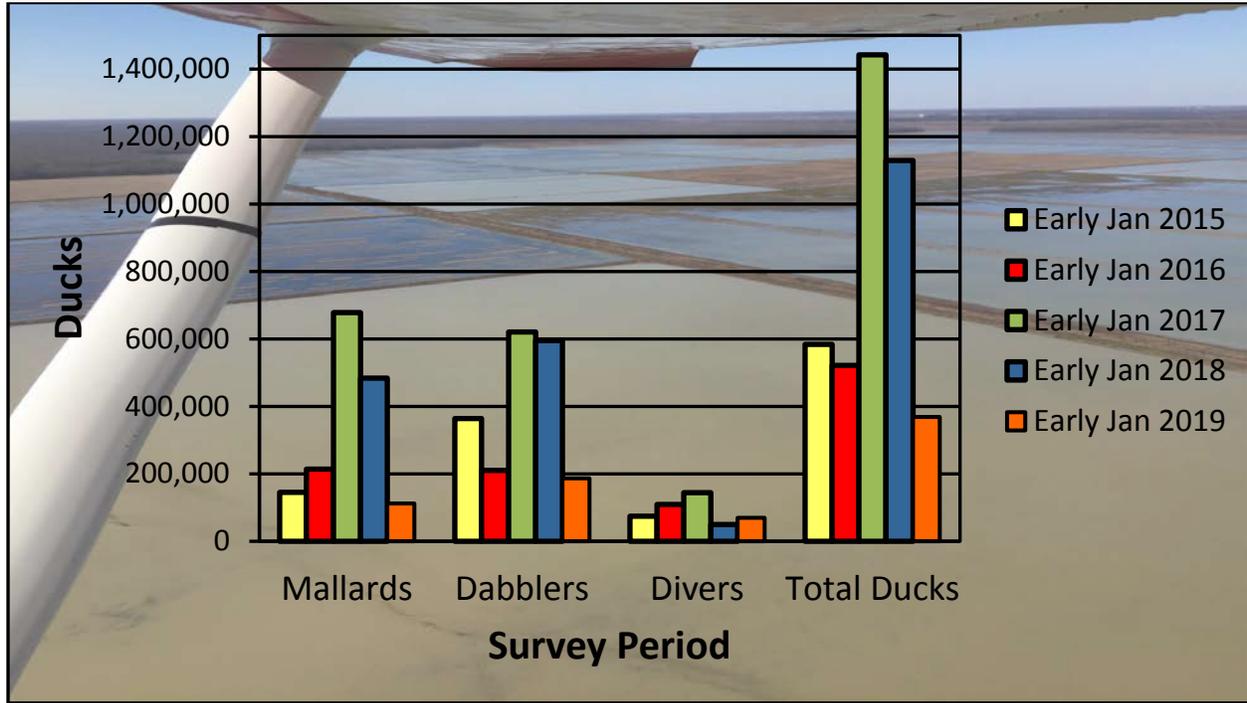


Table 2. Comparison of early January 2019 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for early January survey estimates.

Species Group	Early January 2019	Early January LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	111,787	264,050	-57.7%
Other Dabblers	186,633	386,928	-52.8%
Diving Ducks	69,791	103,528	-32.6%
Total Ducks	368,211	751,768	-51.1%

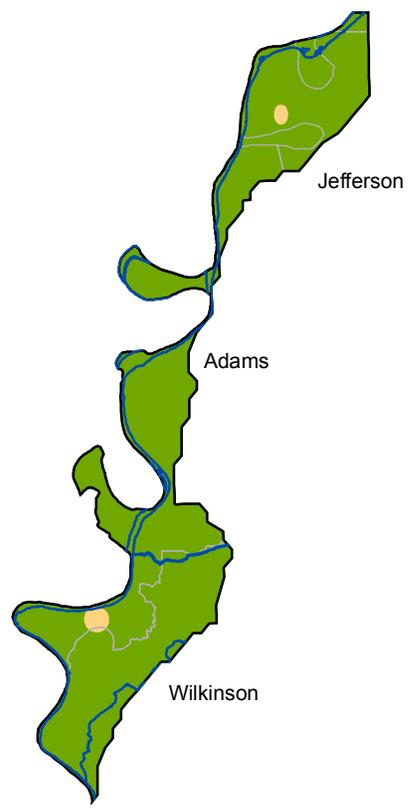
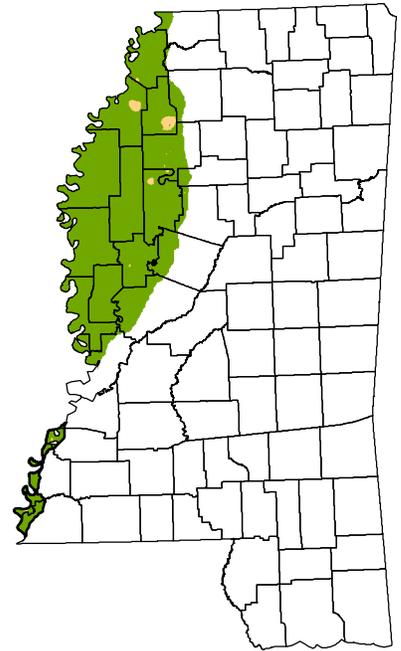
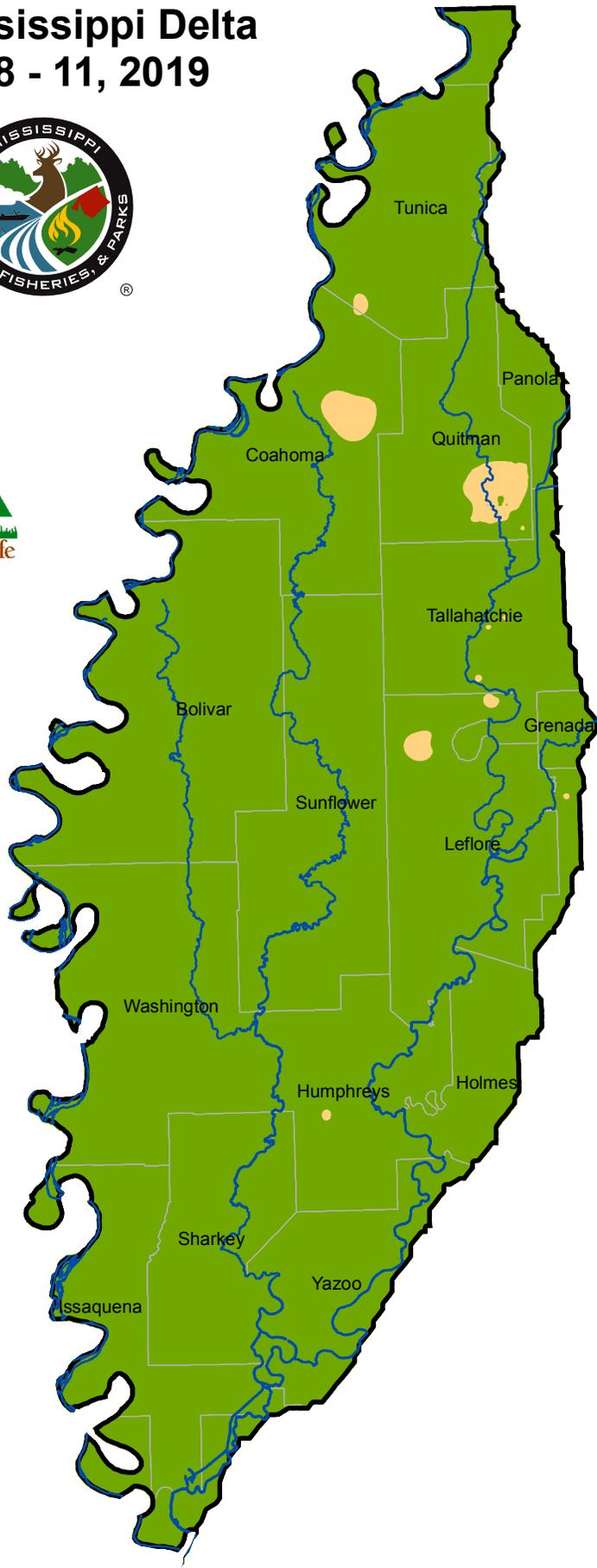
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 8 - 11, 2019



Description

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

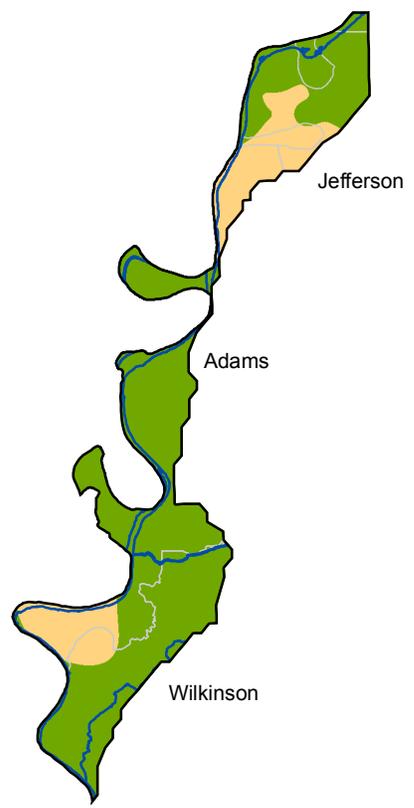
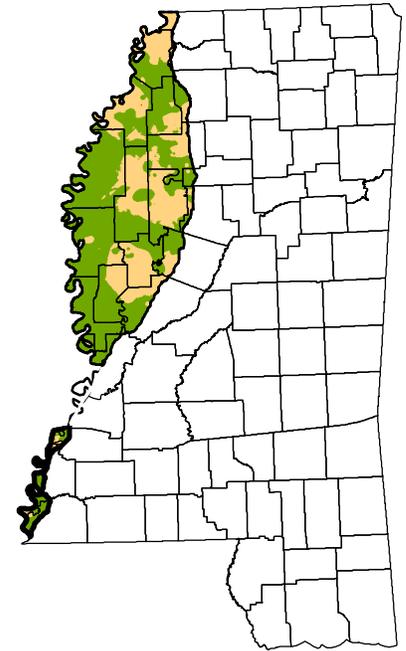
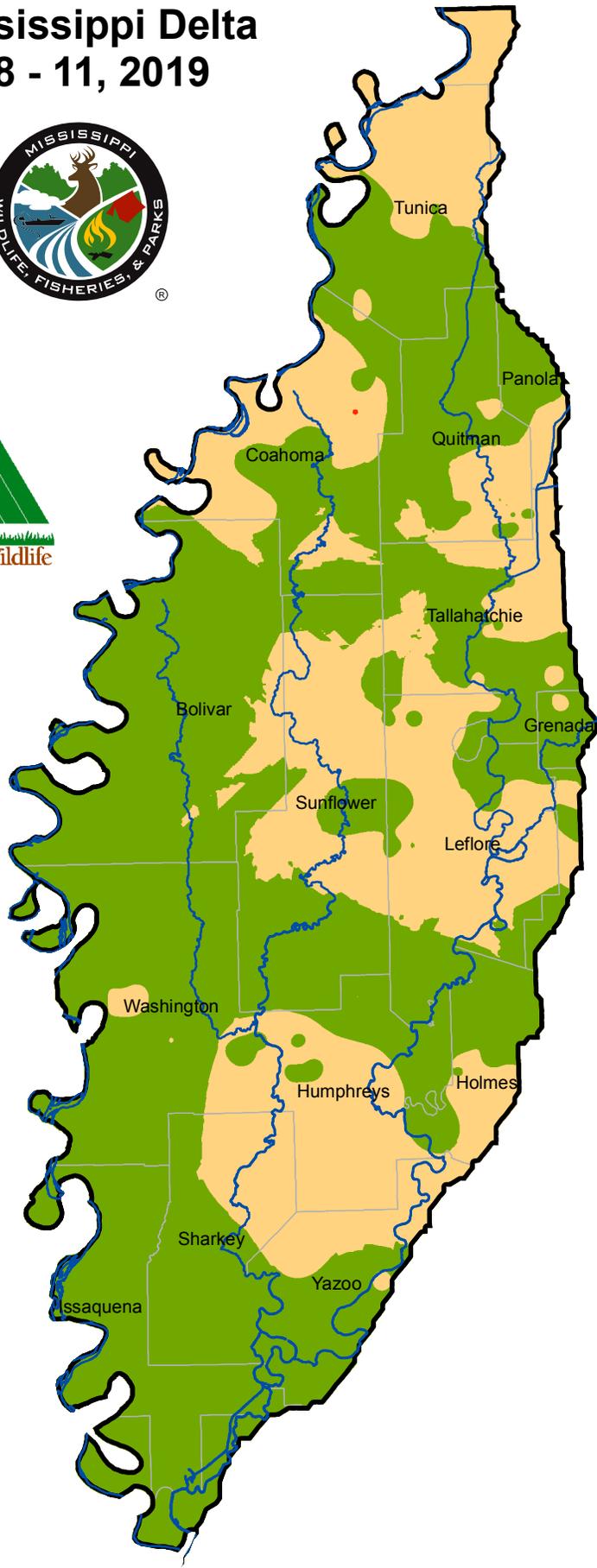


Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 8 - 11, 2019



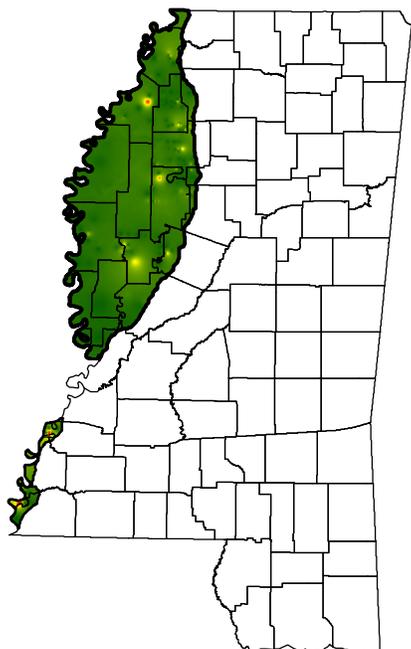
Description

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

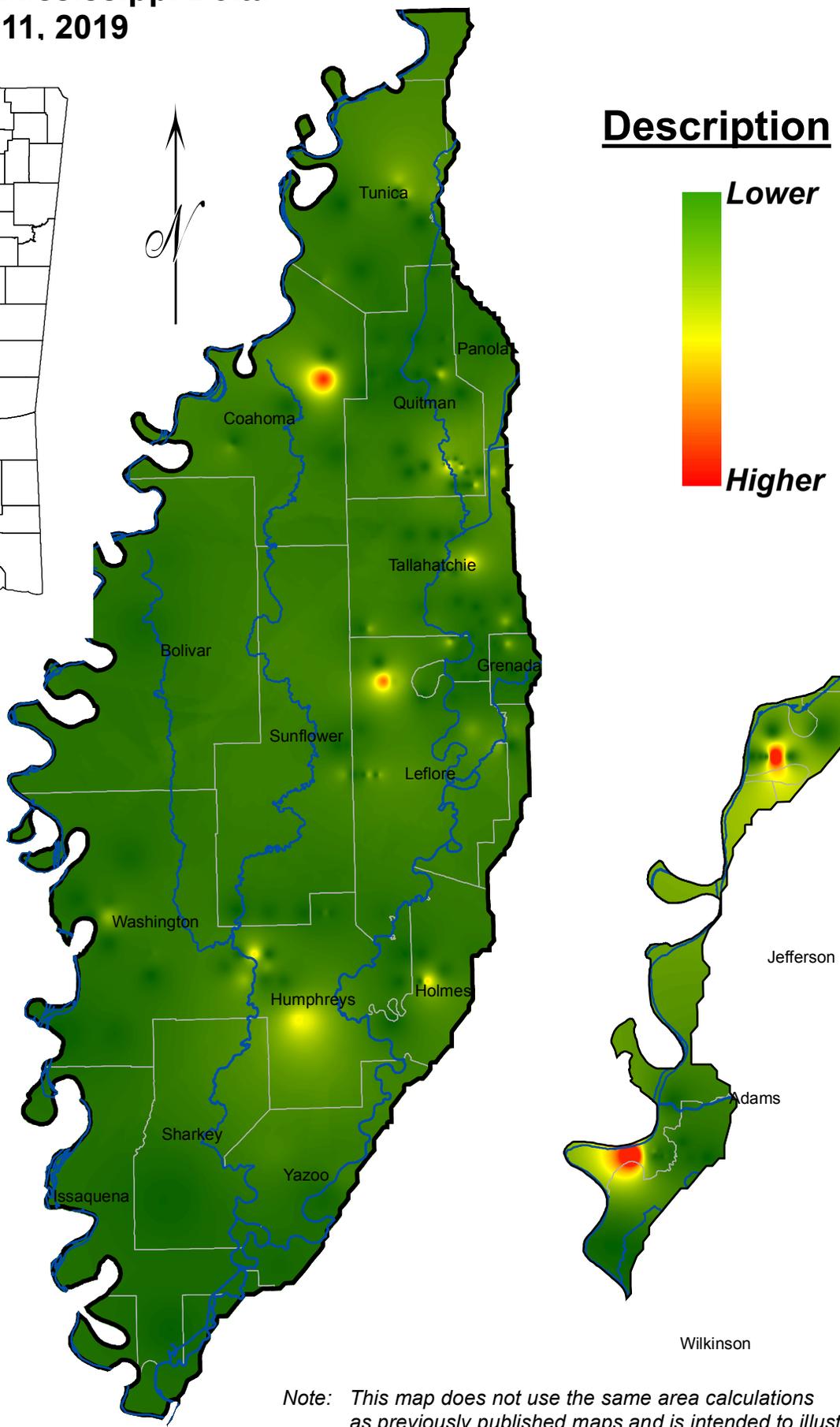
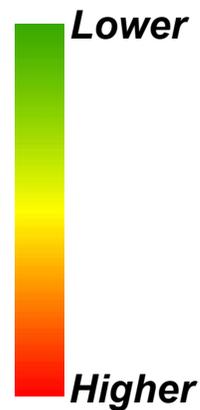


Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 8 - 11, 2019

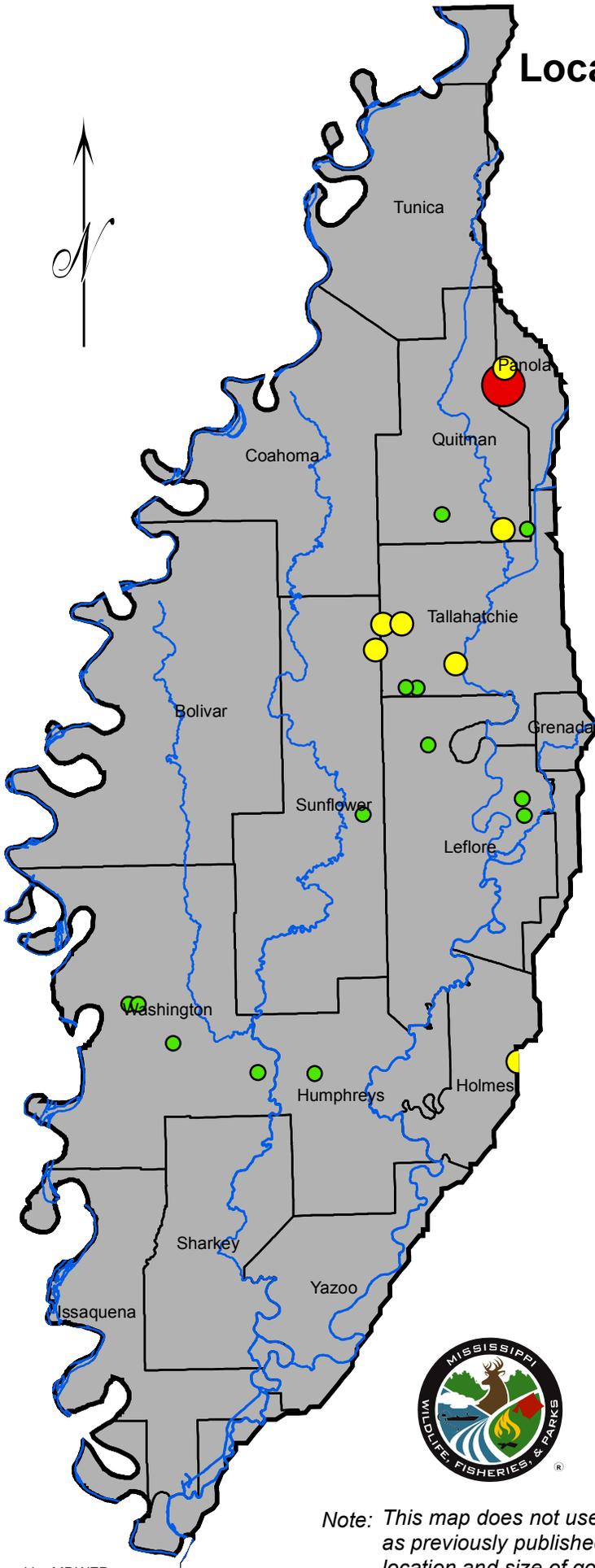


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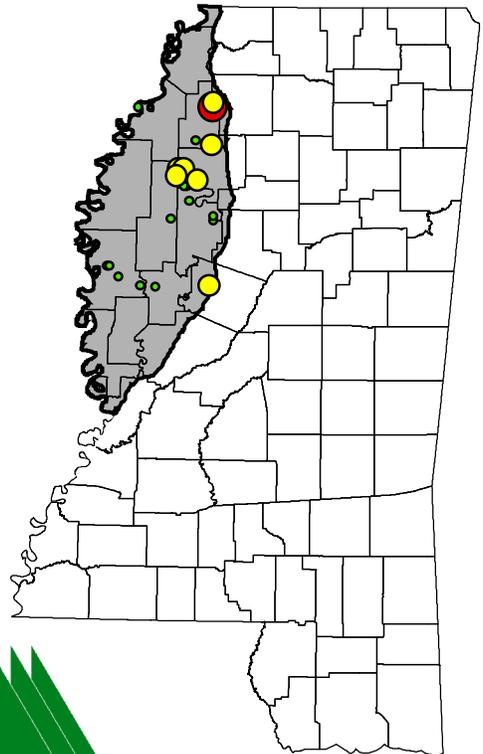
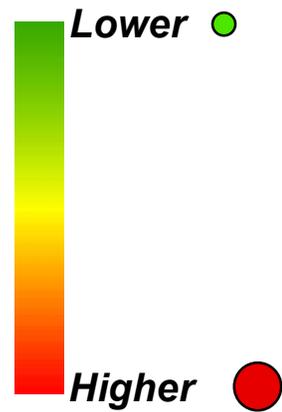


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 8 - 11, 2019



Description



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.