



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 24 - 31, 2024



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The fourth and final MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season was flown January 24 – 31, 2024. Significant delays were experienced due to rain, wind, and fog, which caused this survey to span several more days than planned. Wetland habitat availability increased significantly from the early January survey due to large rain events that occurred after the mid-January freeze. Some areas experienced natural overbank flooding for the first time this winter. As usual, wetland habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast in the Delta region, where multiple landowners and nearby public lands intensively manage a significant number of wetland acres.

Estimates for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks all increased significantly from their early January estimates as a result of the freezing temperatures that swept across the country in mid-January. While the estimate for mallards remained below the long-term average for late January, the estimate for other dabbling ducks was well above the long-term average (Tables 1 and 2). The late January estimate for total ducks was over four times higher than the previous estimates this fall and winter, and approached the long-term average for this time of year. Mallards and other dabblers made up about 90% of all duck observations. Northern shovelers and mallards were the most abundant species observed, followed by gadwall. Ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed. The northeastern portion of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards, other dabbling ducks, and total ducks overall while the southeastern portion held the greatest numbers of diving ducks.

Mallards and other dabblers were most observed using flooded agriculture fields, likely in response to the previous week's extremely low temperatures. Once shallow water wetlands with abundant foods began to thaw, ducks were observed quickly responding as they sought to replenish energy reserves. As usual, most diving ducks were observed using aquaculture ponds and deep, permanent water bodies. In agricultural fields, ducks were commonly observed in large complexes with multiple flooded fields. Contrasting to the previous surveys, ducks were more evenly distributed across newly available wetland habitat, which is typical of late-season behavior. Large flocks of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') mixed with greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were commonly observed.

The large increase in duck abundance estimates observed following the mid-January extreme weather event was a welcomed way to end the 2023-24 duck hunting season for many Mississippi hunters. A season of otherwise mostly dry, mild weather conditions concluded on a high note as waterfowl were finally forced to migrate southward. Hunters are reminded that the light goose conservation order will remain open in Mississippi through March 31.

For more information on waterfowl and wetland habitat, visit the MDWFP Waterfowl Program website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey periods, 2008-2024.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2008	110,476	182,869	70,396	363,741
2009	262,235	318,638	232,878	740,591
2010	234,937	333,240	112,167	680,344
2011	247,913	454,578	215,821	918,313
2012	278,205	436,996	199,926	915,127
2013	146,782	273,905	83,119	503,806
2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015	162,098	356,993	82,733	596,092
2016	307,177	482,843	206,983	997,003
2017	267,078	483,037	106,419	815,903
2018	334,140	516,240	45,587	895,968
2019	151,742	309,696	74,525	532,413
2020	252,276	507,754	106,770	839,005
2021	183,868	209,731	44,407	438,006
2022	138,551	222,967	99,631	461,149
2023	182,649	307,643	25,942	516,153
2024	152,099	450,950	64,056	667,105
Average	213,264	365,505	110,710	680,045

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

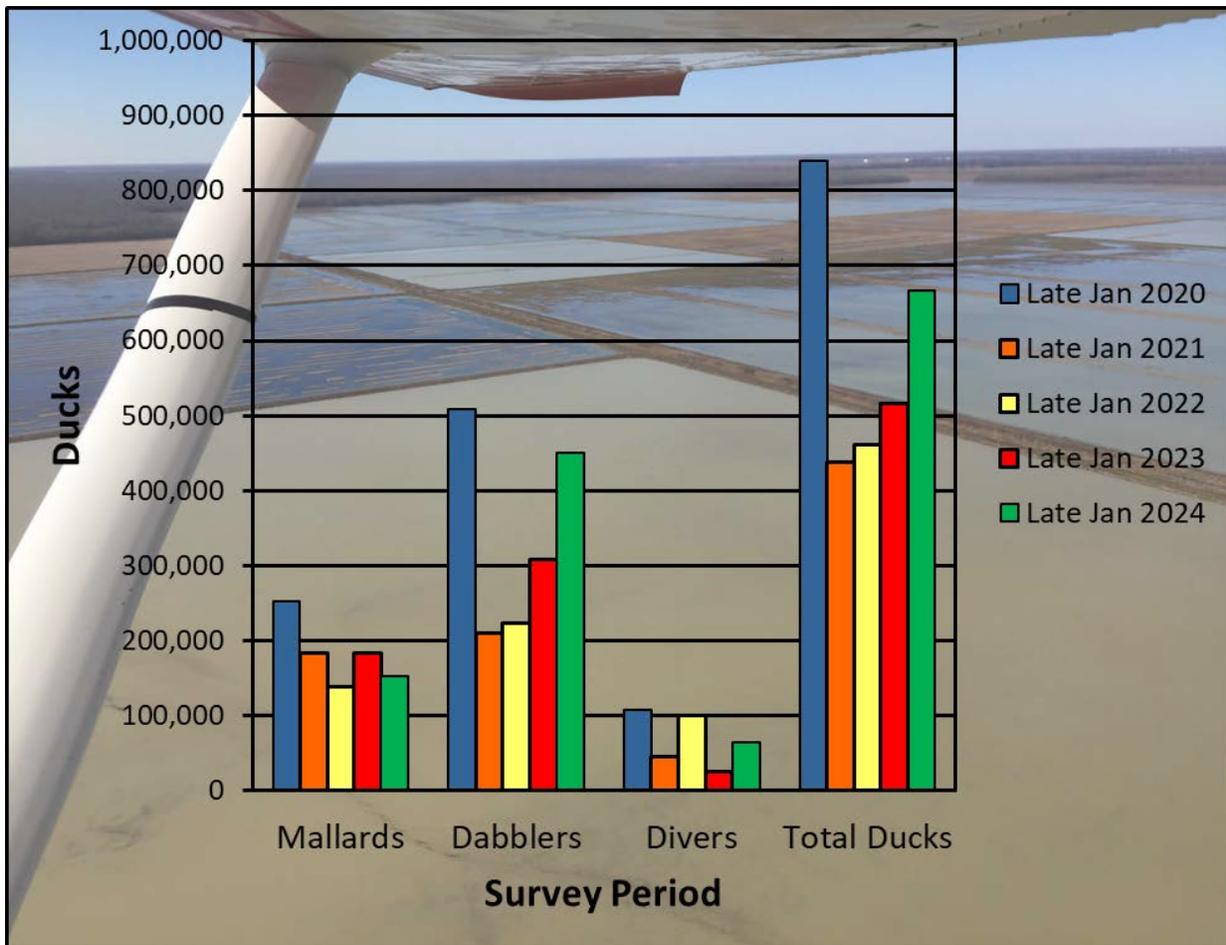
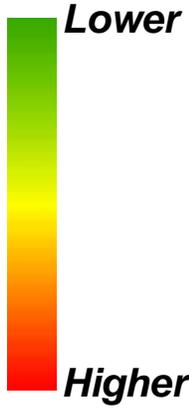


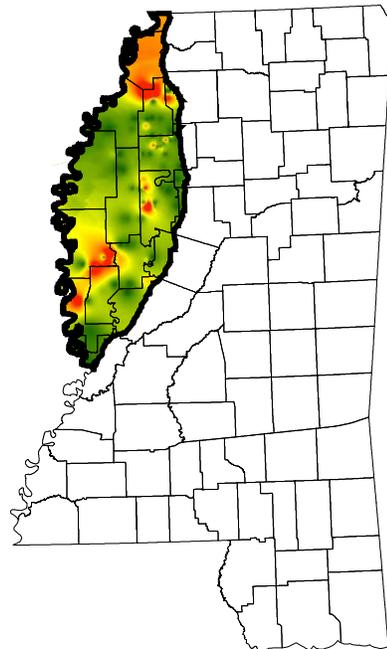
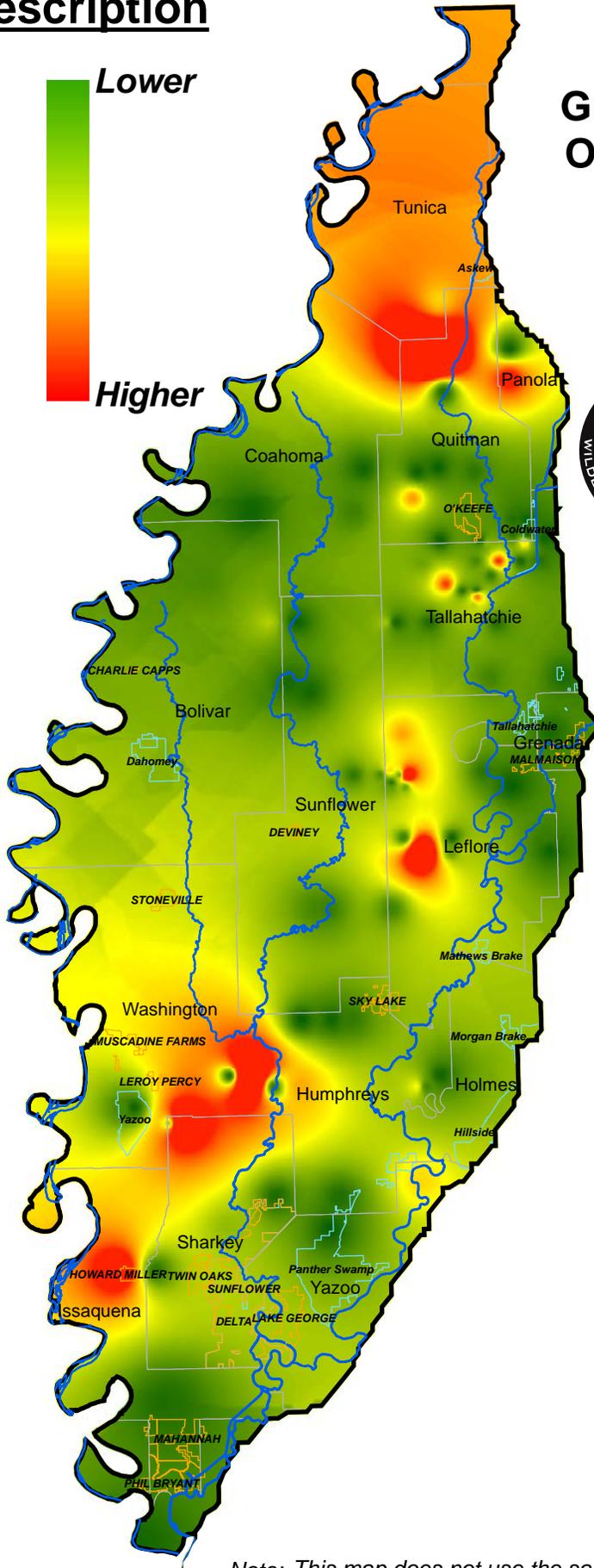
Table 2. Comparison of late January 2024 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for late January survey estimates.

Species Group	Late Jan 2024	Late Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	152,099	213,264	-28.7%
Other Dabblers	450,950	365,505	+23.4%
Diving Ducks	64,056	110,710	-42.1%
Total Ducks	667,105	680,045	-2.0%

Description



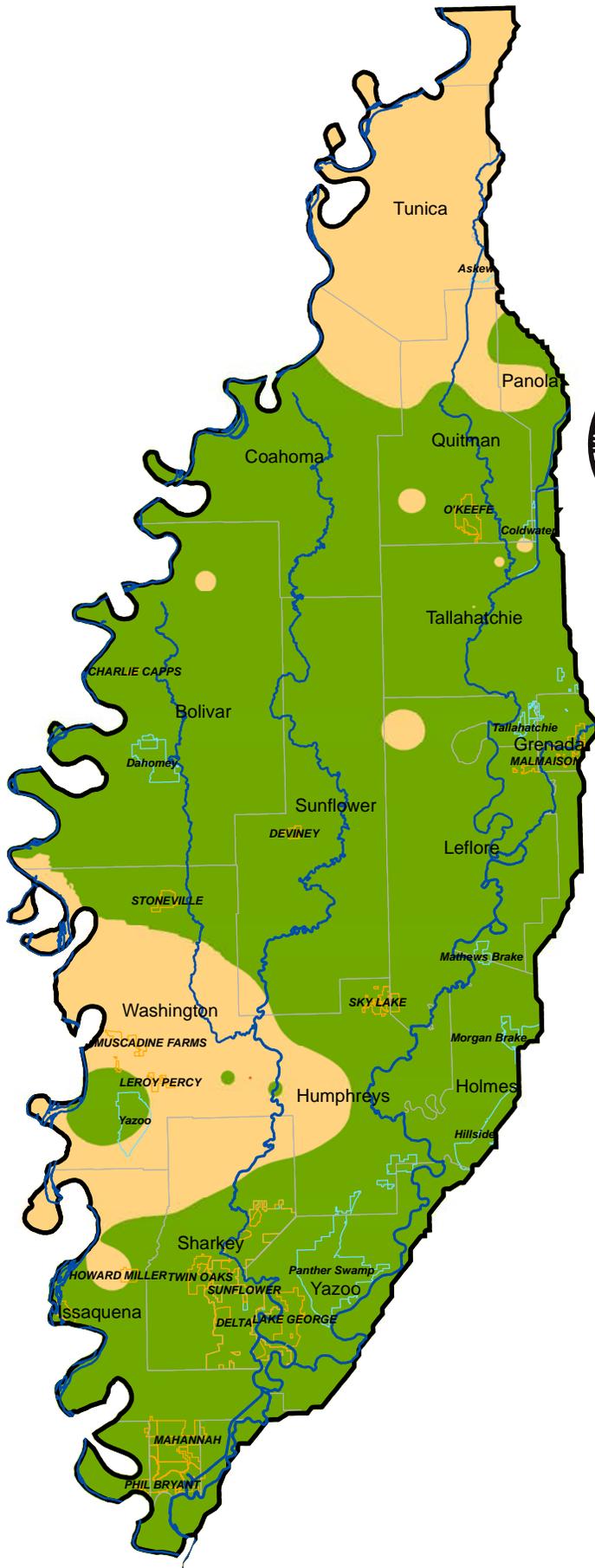
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 29 - 31, 2024



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.

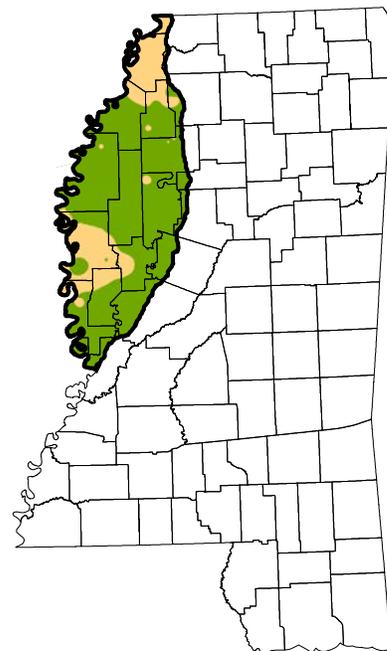
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 29 - 31, 2024



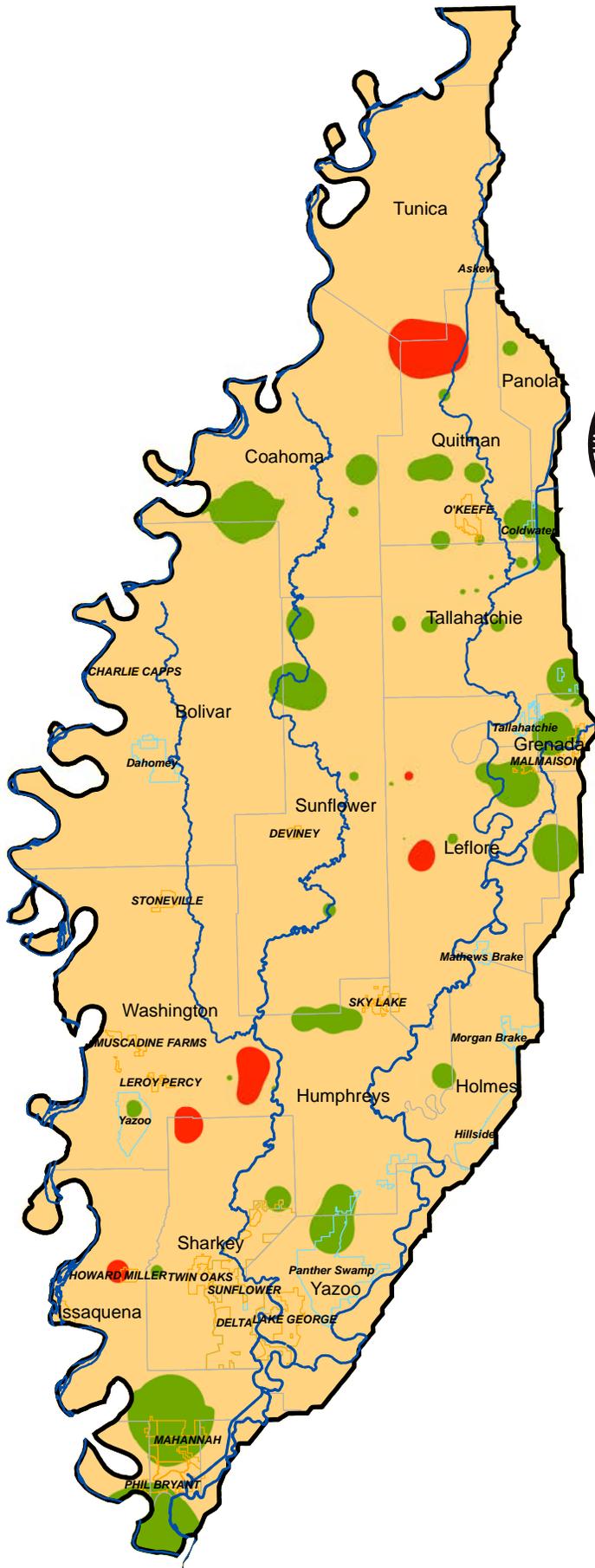
Description

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



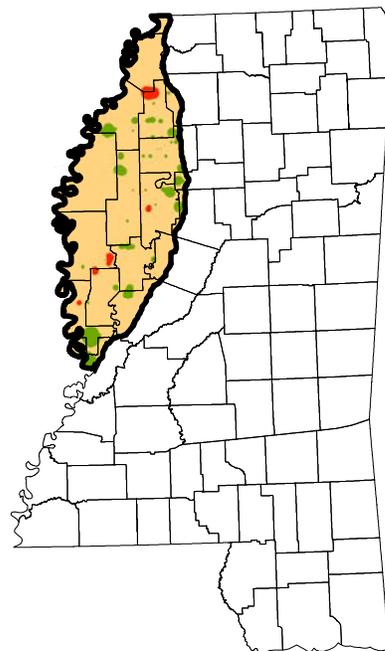
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 29 - 31, 2024



Description

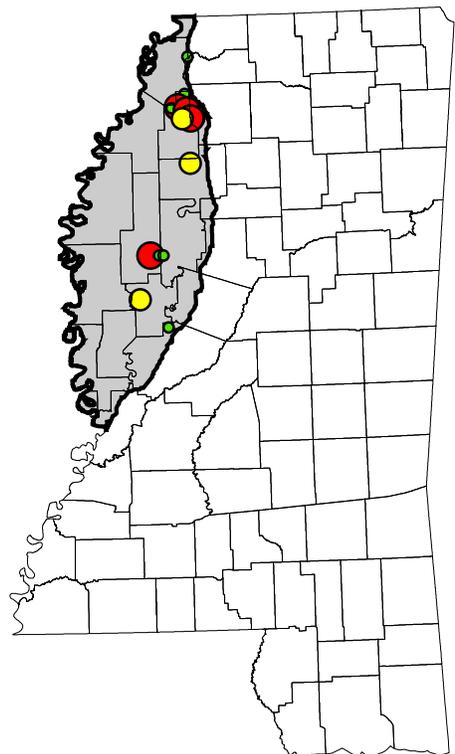
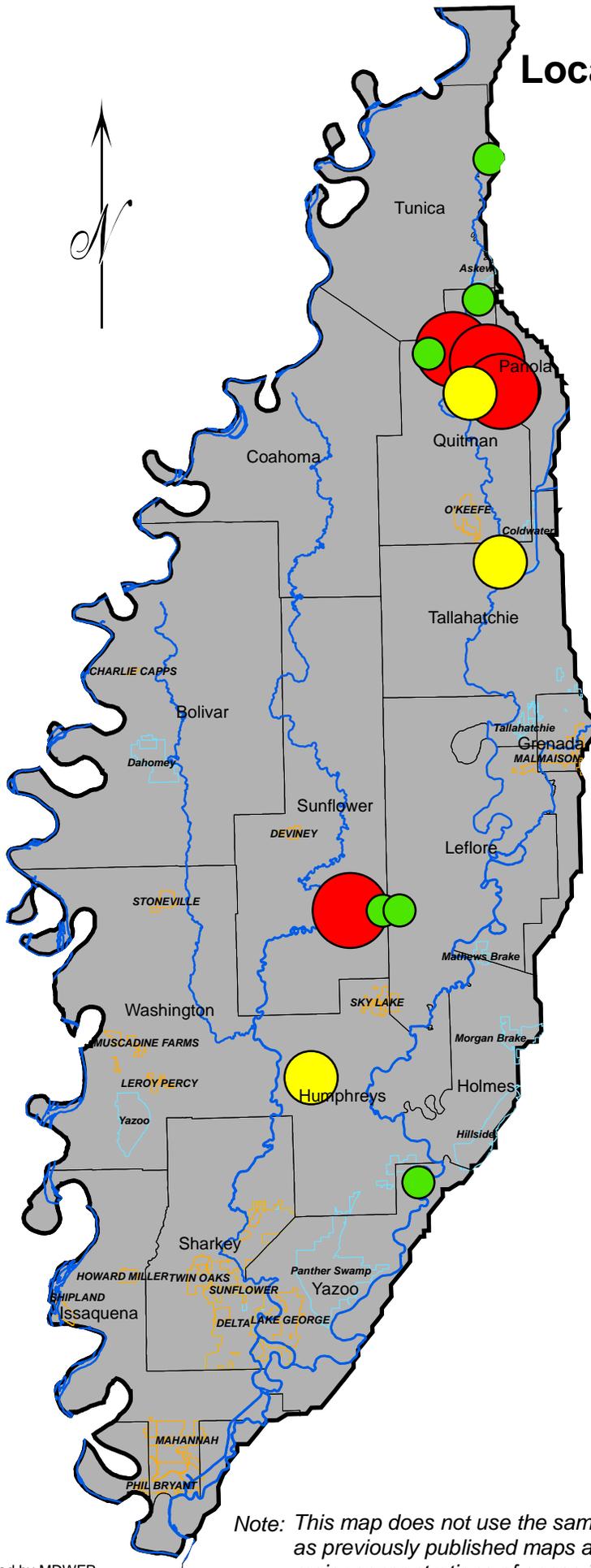
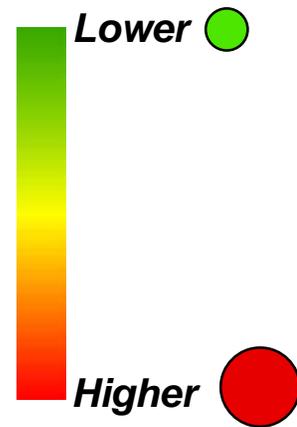
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 29 - 31, 2024



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.