MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

December 15 - 19, 2025

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The second MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred December 15 – 19, 2025. Wetland habitat abundance in the Mississippi Delta has increased since mid-November, particularly in the north, but overall wetland conditions were still below average for this time of year. Public lands are currently providing a large proportion of intensively managed waterfowl habitat, and as a result, ducks were seen responding to these properties and the surrounding areas in relatively high numbers compared to the rest of the Delta. Large concentrations of ducks were also observed using large complexes of managed water across multiple private properties. Icy conditions during most of this survey caused ducks to shift from shallow water to deeper wetlands or to "pack" into areas where concentrations of birds kept shallow water open overnight. A large portion of harvested agricultural fields have been disked, resulting in reduced food availability for waterfowl even if these areas eventually flood in late winter. Substantial opportunity remains for landowners and managers to capture rainfall with water control structures as winter continues and as more waterfowl migrate into the state. Flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northeast portion of the Delta, which also held the highest numbers of waterfowl observed.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta increased from the November survey, but were below the December long-term averages for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks (Tables 1 and 2). However, the mallard estimate significantly increased from November's survey and was the highest December mallard estimate since 2020. Dabbling ducks other than mallards were nearly identical to November's high estimate. Northern shovelers and gadwall were the most abundant (non-mallard) dabbling duck species observed overall. However, northern pintails were counted in relatively high numbers in some areas. Scaup and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed. The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall.

Mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using flooded agricultural fields with open water. This was likely driven by the need to find high-energy food resources during below-freezing temperatures. The second most highly used wetland type for dabbling ducks was "permanent" wetlands, consisting of deeper water areas like sloughs and oxbow lakes. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. As in November, ducks were not evenly distributed across available wetland habitat. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups in areas with managed complexes of diverse wetland habitat. Biologists expect ducks to distribute further as new wetland habitats become available throughout the winter. In stark contrast to November, large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and many greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey and were relatively widespread across the Delta region.

The regular waterfowl hunting seasons are nearing the halfway point and will continue through January 31. The next aerial waterfowl survey is planned for the week of January 5th. Mississippi typically observes peak numbers of wintering waterfowl during the month of January. Above average temperatures have currently settled in for Mississippi, but the extended forecast shows potential for another short round of below freezing weather between Christmas and New Year's, which could continue to push new birds southward into the state. The "Weekly Wingbeat" which

include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions is now being posted each week on the MDWFP website and social media platforms. For these reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl.

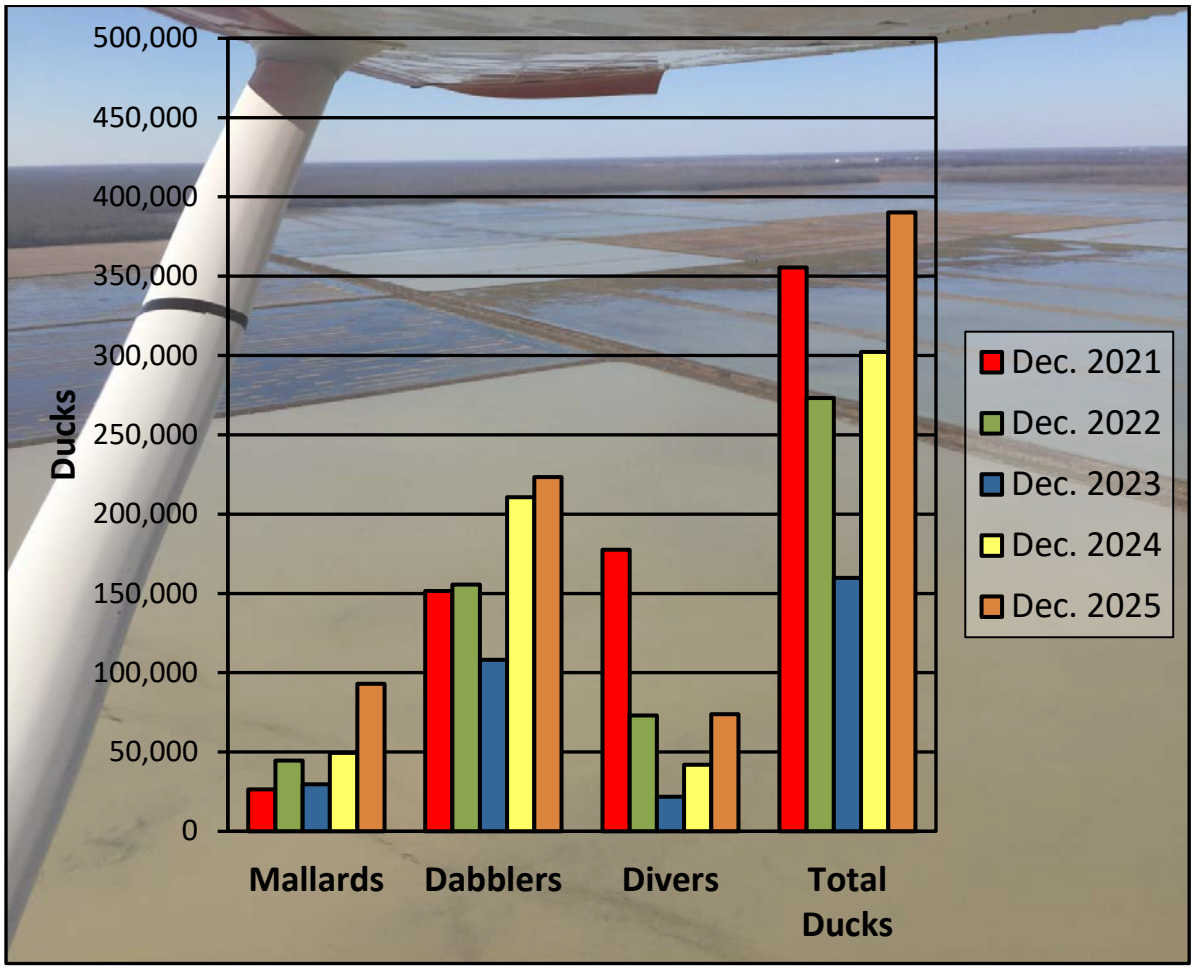
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the December survey periods, 2007-2025.

	Mallards	**Dabblers**	**Divers**	**Total Ducks**
2007	50,368	75,604	41,738	167,710
2008	223,976	389,939	70,750	684,665
2009	116,748	209,346	74,396	400,491
2010	210,531	388,064	236,966	835,561
2011	136,776	281,560	111,423	529,758
2012	122,779	176,950	171,542	471,271
2013	230,634	638,386	100,412	969,432
2014	86,838	331,460	102,117	520,415
2015	139,805	193,719	90,958	424,482
2016	202,135	460,752	146,707	809,594
2017	100,389	366,802	208,749	675,940
2018	84,032	176,070	143,417	403,519
2019	105,827	176,863	104,843	387,533
2020	99,767	167,139	143,458	410,365
2021	26,403	151,460	177,615	355,478
2022	44,554	155,597	73,045	273,196
2023	29,753	108,173	21,809	159,735
2024	49,533	210,620	41,975	302,128
2025	92,947	223,389	73,847	390,183
Average	**113,358**	**256,942**	**112,409**	**482,708**

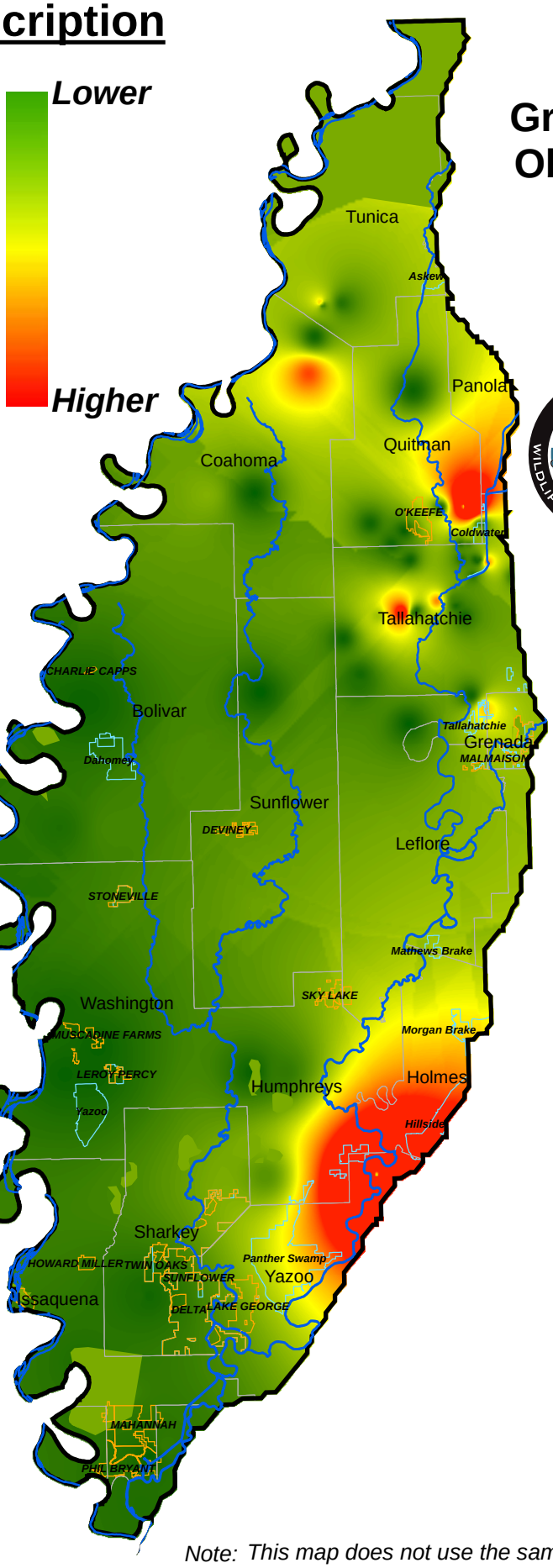
Table 2. Comparison of December 2025 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for December survey estimates.

Species Group	December 2025	December LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	92,947	113,358	-18%
Other Dabblers	223,389	256,942	-13%
Diving Ducks	73,847	112,409	-34%
Total Ducks	**390,183**	**482,708**	**-19%**

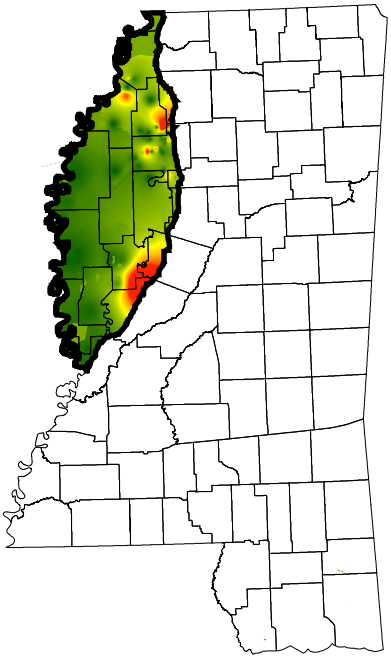
Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the five most recent December survey periods.



Description



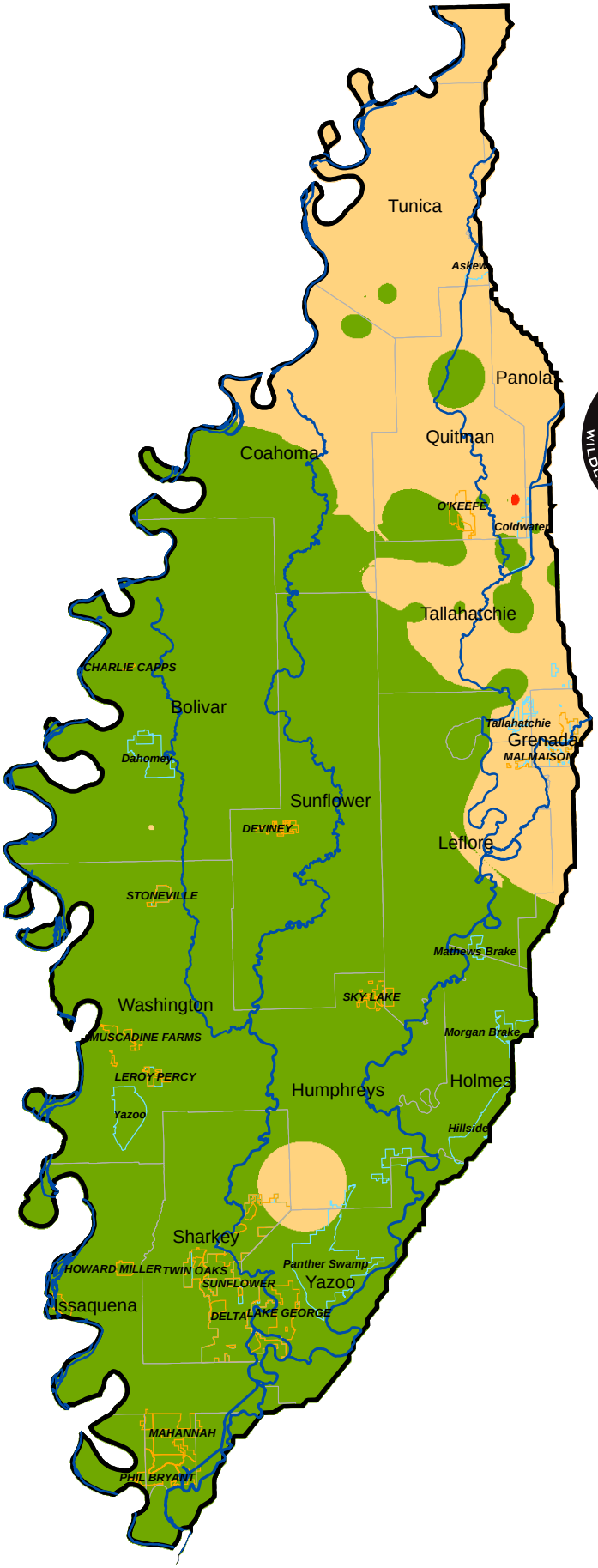
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 15 - 19, 2025



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.

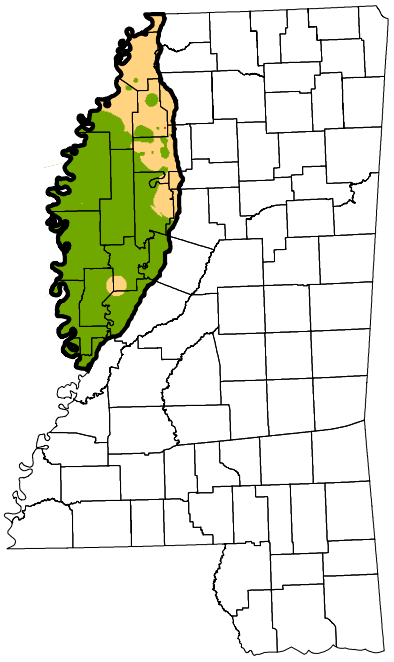
Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab Dec. 23, 2023

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 15 -19, 2025



Description

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



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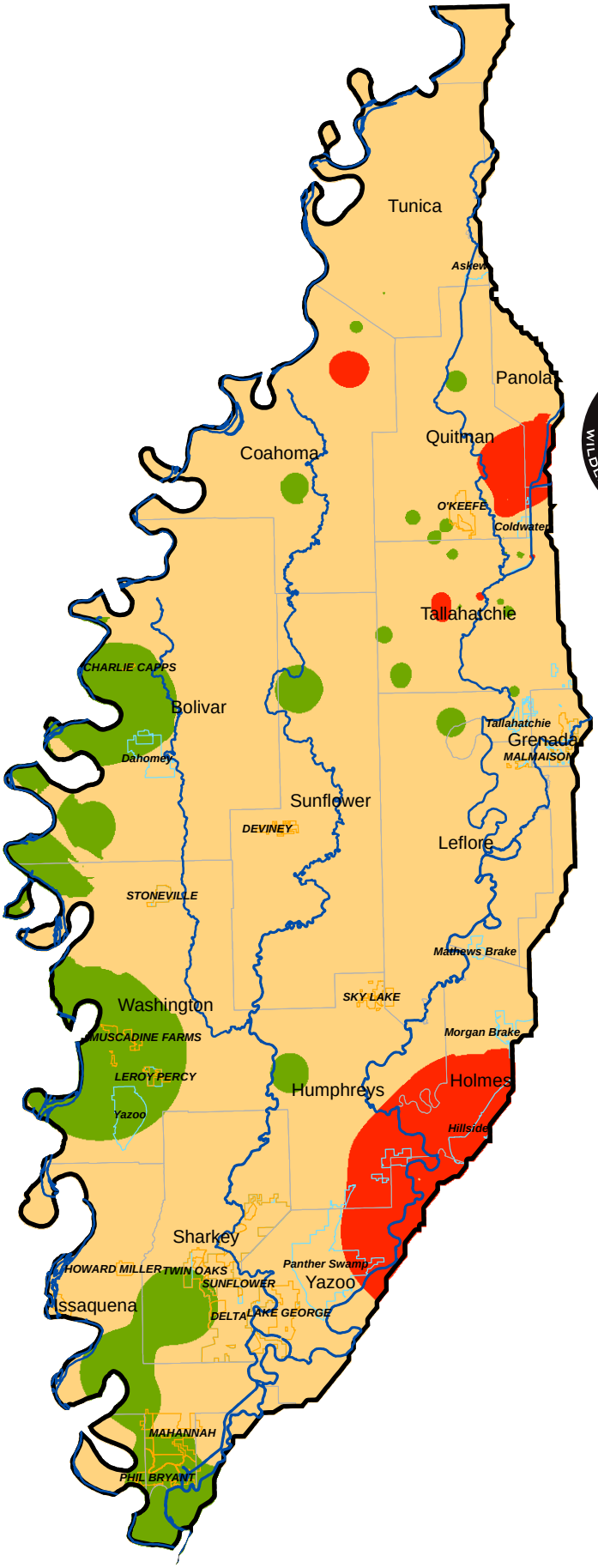
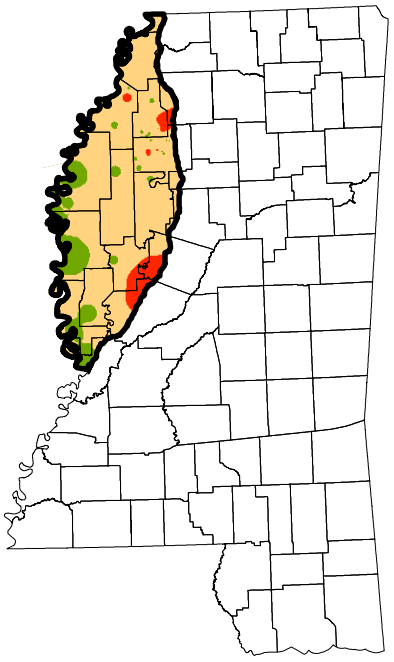
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta
Dec. 15 - 19, 2025



Description

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



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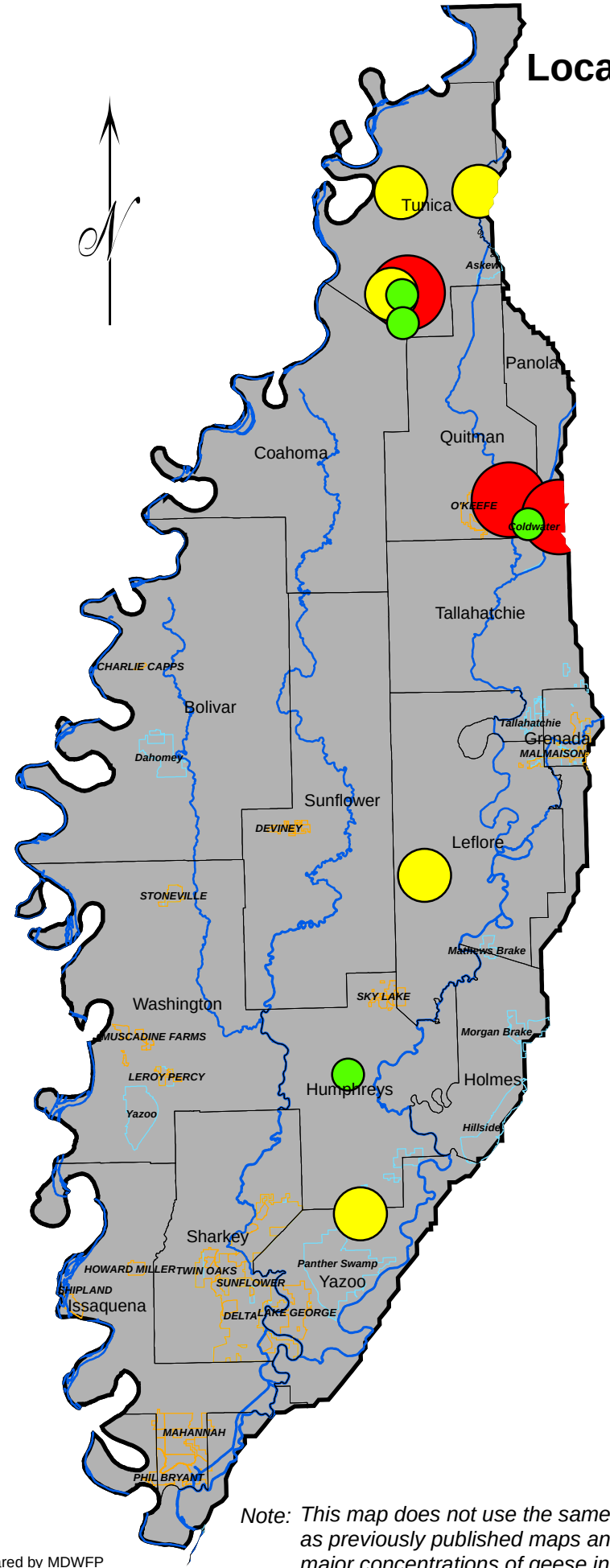
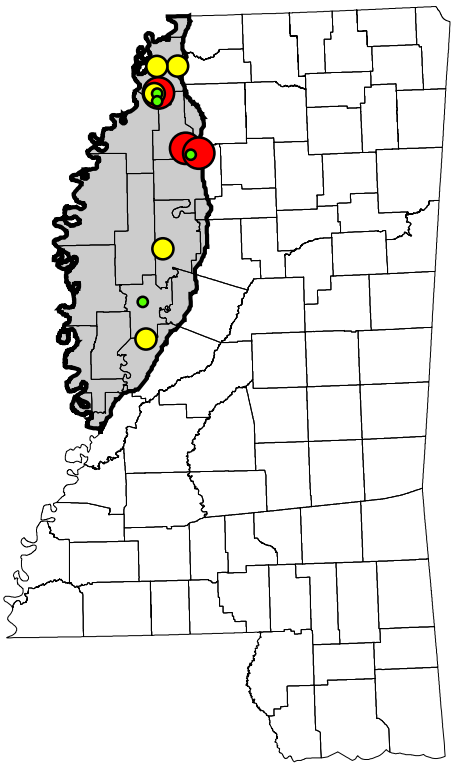
Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Dec. 15 - 19, 2025



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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