



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 5 - 20, 2026



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The mid-winter MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey experienced multiple and various delays, and was flown January 5 – 20, 2026. Wetland habitat abundance in most of the Mississippi Delta has remained stable since mid-December and is still well below average for this time of year. Groundwater pumping was a common observation, with some wetlands even losing surface water area from December to January. Once again, ducks were observed using areas with large complexes of managed water across multiple properties in the immediately surrounding landscape. Flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northern portions of the Delta. The Mississippi River and its interior Delta tributaries have experienced increased water levels since mid-December, but no natural over-bank flooding has occurred this winter.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta increased substantially from the December survey, with large increases for dabbling ducks other than mallards being the highlight (Tables 1 and 2). The estimate for non-mallard dabbling ducks exceeded the long-term average for this time of year, and total ducks nearly reached the respective long-term average as well. While the mallard estimate also showed a large increase from mid-December, it remained below the long-term average for early January. Dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised nearly 70% of all duck observations. Gadwall, northern shovelers, and green-winged teal were the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, but substantial concentrations of northern pintails were again observed in some areas. Ring-necked ducks and scaup were the most abundant diving duck species observed, as usual. The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall. These observations were expected, given the relatively high availability of wetland habitat in this area compared to other regions.

In the Mississippi Delta, mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using natural moist-soil wetlands. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. Ducks were more evenly distributed across available wetland habitat during this survey, compared to the November and December surveys. Biologists expect ducks to become relatively concentrated again throughout the incoming freezing temperatures being forecasted, and then to spread out again when shallow wetlands thaw and become available. As in December, large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and many greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey.

The regular waterfowl hunting seasons will continue through January 31. The next aerial waterfowl survey is planned for the week of January 26 if weather allows. Mississippi typically experiences peak numbers of wintering waterfowl during the month of January, and although early January saw a substantial increase, biologists and hunters are hopeful that late January will bring another increase and produce peak numbers this year. However, with forecasted temperatures next week, duck distributions could be impacted by ice, which could impact the ability to estimate duck abundance.

Weekly Wingbeat waterfowl reports which include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions are 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>.

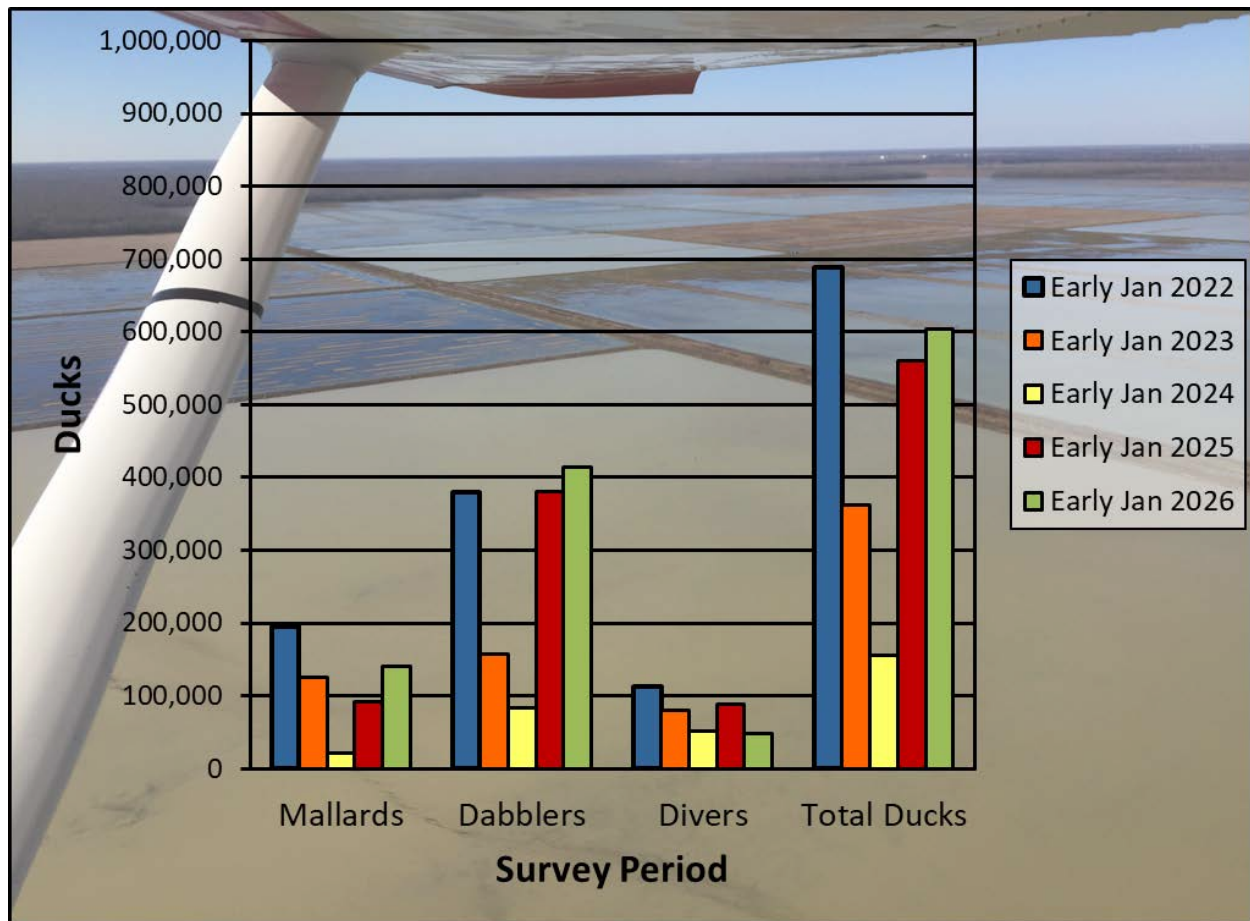
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the early January survey periods, 2008-2026.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2008	204,322	248,542	74,342	527,205
2009	191,236	278,601	66,691	536,529
2010	281,622	440,314	170,797	892,734
2011	197,319	352,858	120,700	670,878
2012	215,268	339,908	100,202	655,379
2013	131,930	263,852	70,775	448,586
2014	313,851	742,182	191,888	1,244,714
2015	145,153	364,349	74,502	584,004
2016	213,759	210,159	109,414	521,662
2017	678,235	620,432	143,739	1,442,406
2018	484,121	595,303	49,488	1,128,912
2019	111,787	186,633	69,791	368,211
2020	173,834	367,714	58,875	600,423
2021	73,724	381,903	34,315	489,942
2022	195,533	379,391	113,217	688,141
2023	125,221	156,929	80,177	362,327
2024	20,869	82,800	51,401	155,070
2025	91,865	380,573	87,833	560,204
2026	140,042	414,947	48,175	603,165
Average	209,984	358,284	90,333	656,868

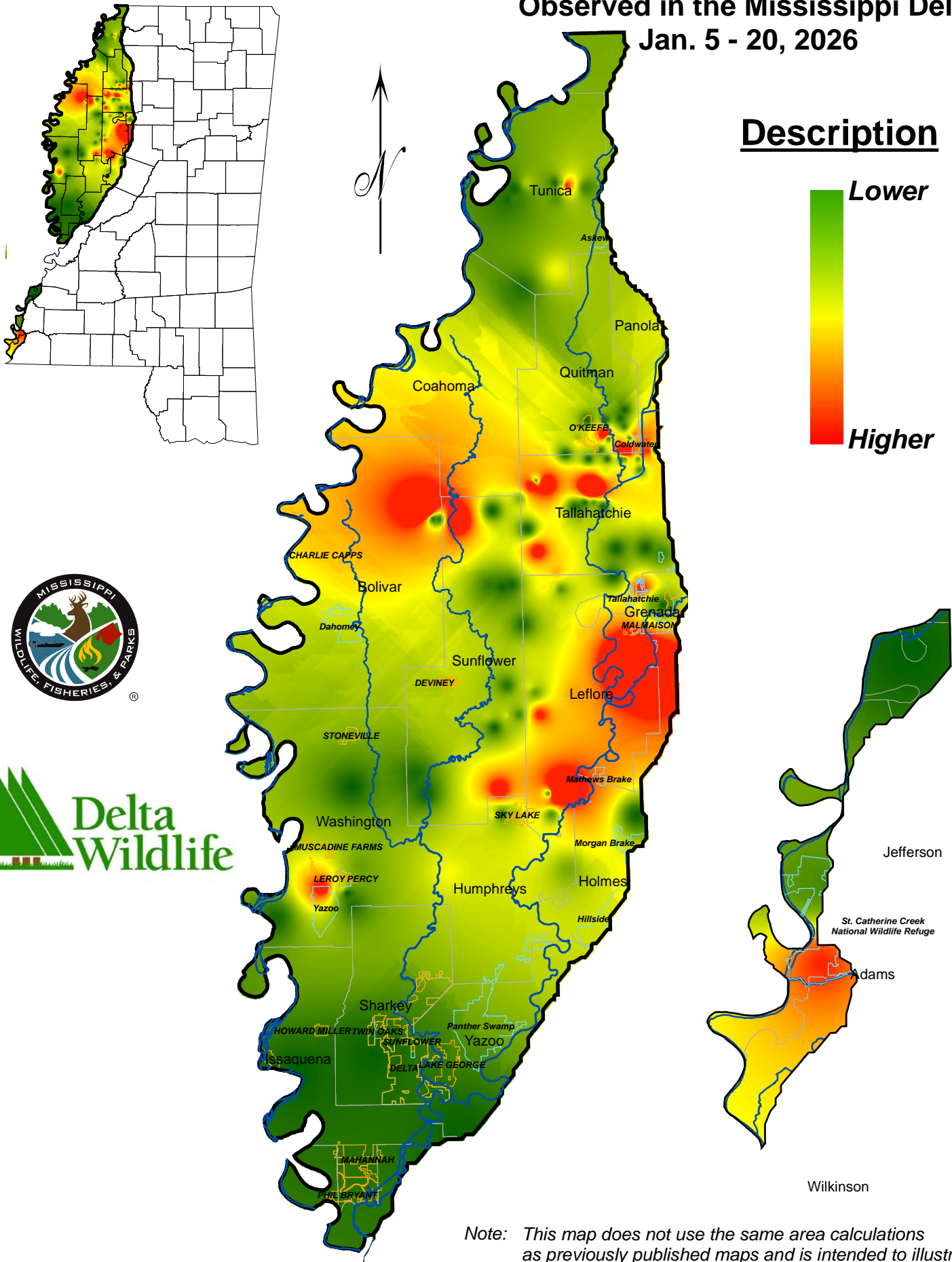
Table 2. Comparison of early January 2026 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for early January survey estimates.

Species Group	Early Jan 2026	Early Jan LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	140,042	209,984	-33%
Other Dabblers	414,947	358,284	+16%
Diving Ducks	48,175	90,333	-47%
Total Ducks	603,165	656,868	-8%

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



Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 5 - 20, 2026



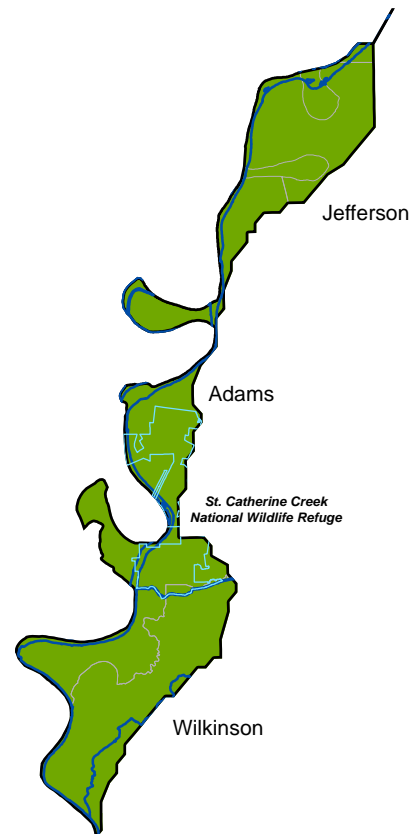
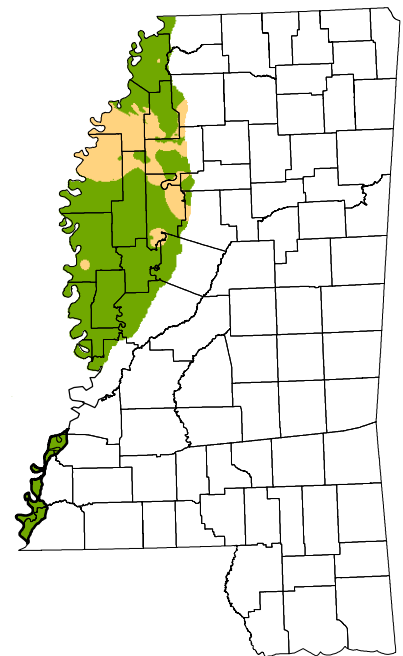
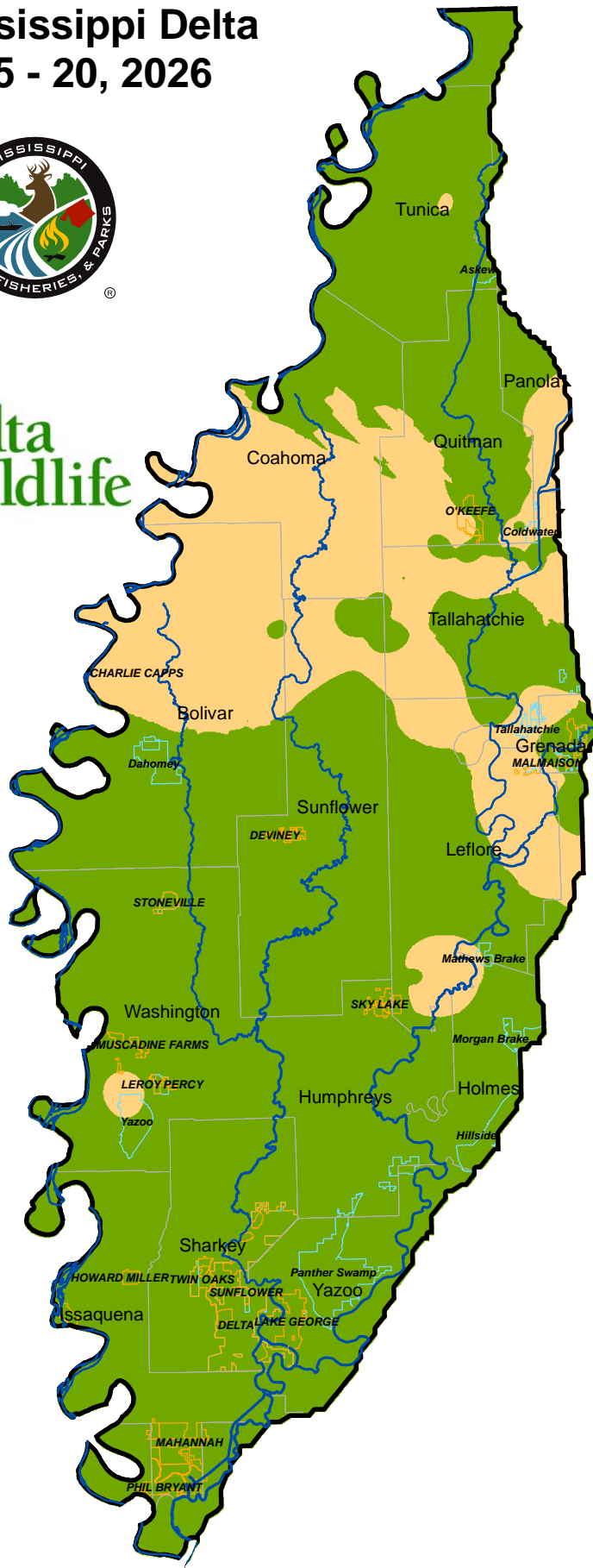
Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 5 - 20, 2026



Description

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



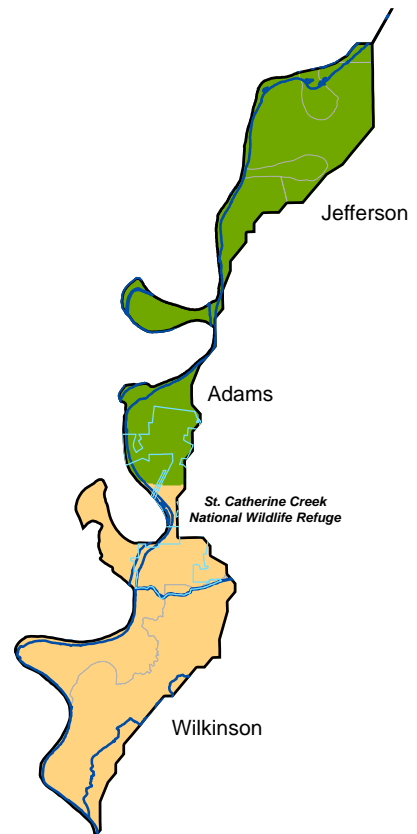
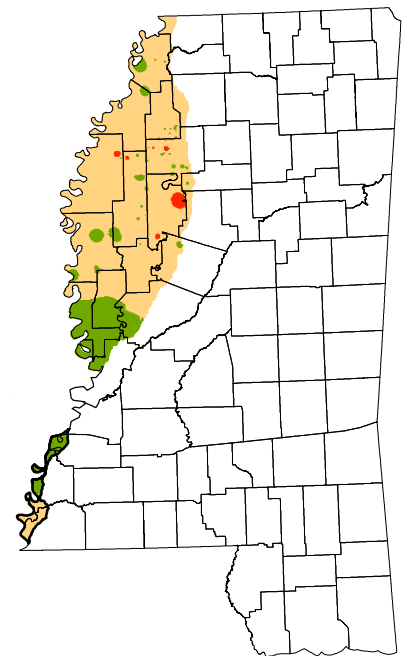
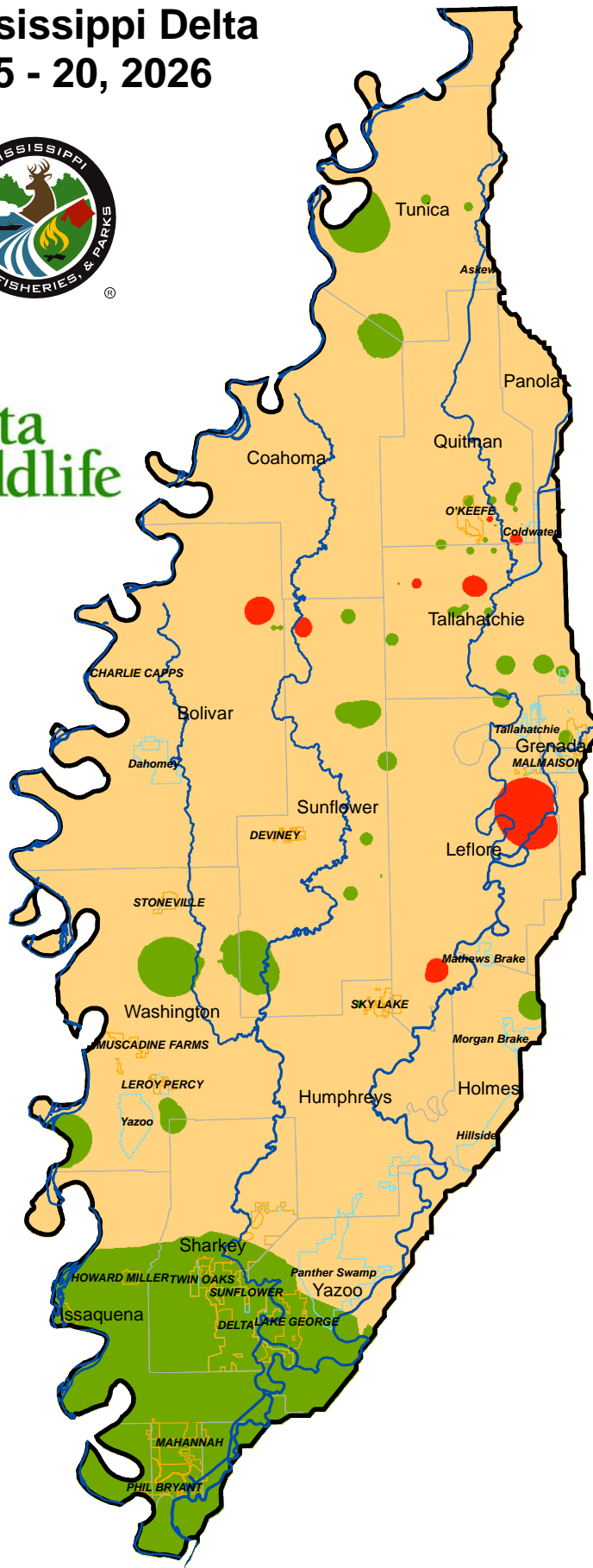
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 5 - 20, 2026

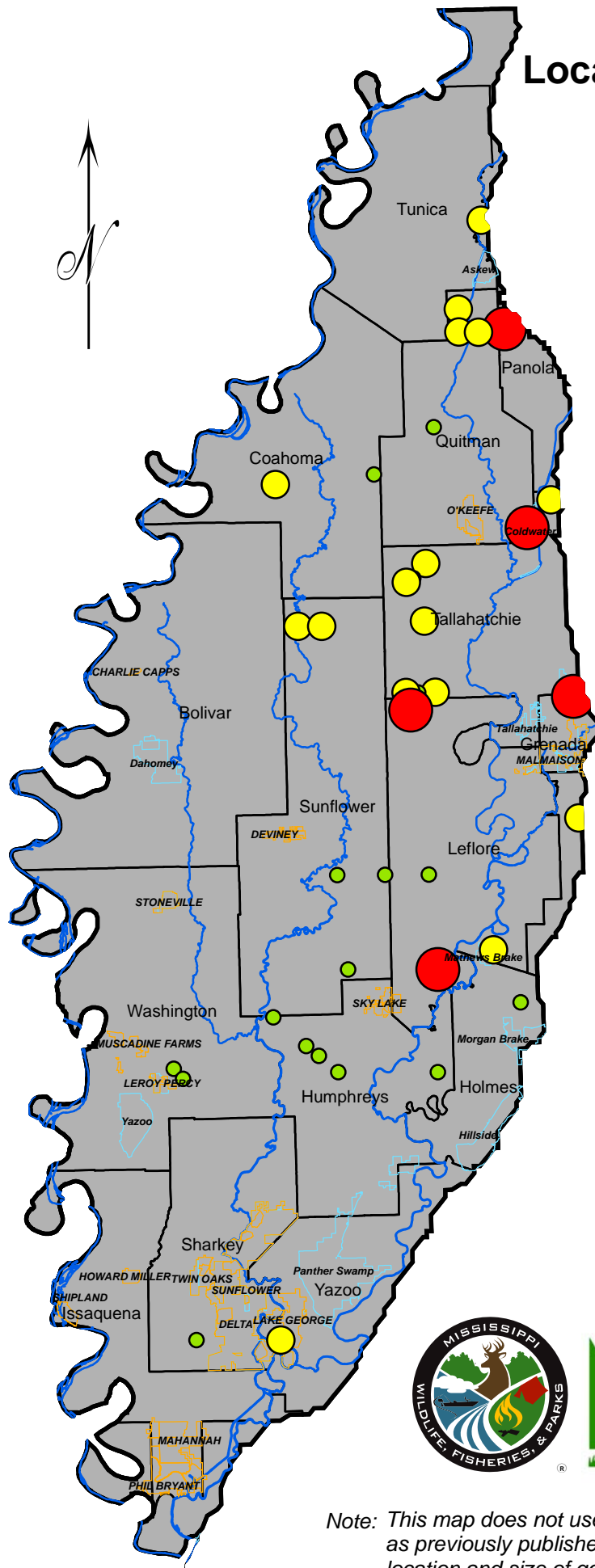


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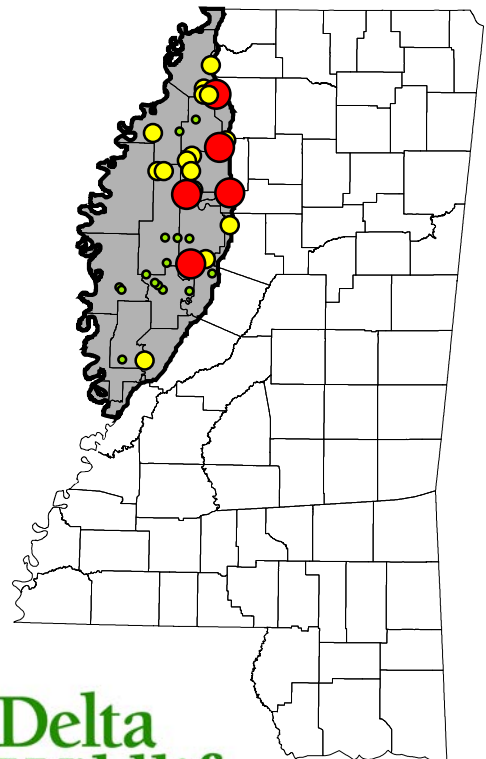
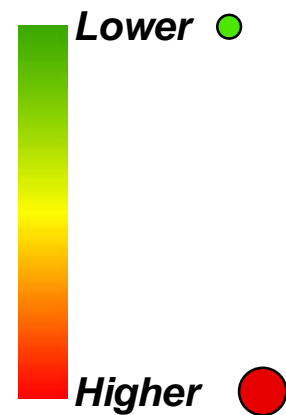
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 5 - 20, 2026



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.