



The extent of Arctic sea ice reached a record low Monday, according to the University of Colorado National Snow and Ice Data Center, and is on track to decline further in the next two weeks.

The news that the Arctic sea ice cover had shrunk to 1.58 million square miles (4.1 million square kilometers) on Sunday came two days after Royal Dutch Shell's drill ship, the Noble Discoverer, took advantage of reduced sea ice and started sailing from Alaska's Dutch Harbor to the Chukchi Sea, in anticipation of final federal approval for oil exploration activities there.

The area covered by Arctic summer sea ice usually reaches its low point around Sept. 13, when the region begins to cool. But it has been melting at an unprecedented 38,600 square miles (100,000 square kilometers) per day, and it is likely to decline even further before the ice begins to re-form. The last minimum sea-ice record of 1.61 million square miles (4.17 million square kilometers) was set in September 2007.

Walt Meier, a research scientist at the National Snow and Ice Data Center, said long-term warming coupled with recent weather conditions account for the new low.

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