September 2009 Sea Ice Outlook: August Report

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Best Guess: 4.151 million km²
Method: Heuristic/Statistical

Update:

The current conditions (Figure 1):
Ice extent 8.375 million km²
Ice Area 6.842 million km²,
Average concentration 81.7%

Multiyear ice extent 4.900 million km²
Multiyear ice area 2.544 million km²
Average concentration 51.9%

Methodology:

Using the most current hemispheric ice chart and ArcGIS, the map is edited to select all parcels with MYI as the primary ice type. All other parcels are discarded. The remaining ice is edited following the assumptions below. A senior ice analyst (Mr. Szorc) examines and approves the outlooks. Mr. Holden and Ms. Panowicz also provide input.

The Seasonal Outlooks:

Conservative: Any area with MYI survives
Ice extent: 4.773 million km²
Ice area: 4.279 million km²
Average concentration 89.7%
MYI extent: 4.773 million km² (includes all parcels containing MYI)
MYI area: 2.439 million km²
Average concentration: 51.1%

Moderate: Any area with 20% or more MYI survives
Ice extent: 4.151 million km²
Ice area: 3.890 million km²
Average concentration 93.7%
MYI extent: 4.151 million km²
MYI area: 2.253 million km²
Average concentration: 54.3%

Aggressive: Any area with 40% or more MYI survives
Ice extent: 2.935 million km²
Ice area: 2.785 million km²
Average concentration: 94.9%
MYI extent: 2.935 million km²

Arbetter et al.
As was the case last year, the charts represent the parcels of ice that we believe will survive the summer. However it does not represent their final location. Drift due to wind and water will transport along the Beaufort Gyre out of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. Some ice in the Amundsen Basin will be transported out into the Barents Sea. The distribution of the ice in September 2009 will be very different than the current August 1 conditions.

From the spread of prognostications, we believe the Moderate case (4.151 million km²) is the most likely. This would be a record or near-record, depending on the method used to measure the ice extent and concentration. The National Ice Center (NIC) uses ice charts where the data used to make the chart can come from a variety of sources (e.g., RadarSAT, MODIS, AMSR-E, SSM/I). The National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC)—the center most often cited for sea ice extrema—uses the Sea Ice Index, based primarily on SSM/I measurements. Differences in how the data are processed can also lead to different values of sea ice extent and area.
Figure 1: Sea ice conditions for June 22, 2009, and projections for September 15, 2009. For the projections, Extreme = red, Aggressive = red + orange, Moderate = red + orange + yellow, Conservative = red + orange + yellow + green.