

**Journal #2664**

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**8.24.12**

*The Kawaiisu Tribe*

*Constructing Lives at Mission San Francisco: Native Californians and Hispanic Colonists*

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*In the Shadow of Wounded Knee*

**The Kawaiisu Tribe welcomes you to our official Home Page. Feel free to visit us often and share our ancient heritage.**

**Pogmatog Magot (Creator Knows)**

David Laughing Horse Robinson, Chairman

The Kawaiisu Tribe, P.O. Box 20849, Bakersfield, CA 93390, [horserobinson@hotmail.com](mailto:horserobinson@hotmail.com)

[Link to Congressional Documents and Kawaiisu pictograph and petroglyph solar and lunar calendars](#)

The Kawaiisu are a Southern California Native American tribe who are well known for elaborate basketry, culture and rock art. The name "Kawaiisu" was given to the tribe by neighboring people and over the course of academic study has been the label that is most used. The Kawaiisu language is unique in pronunciation and structure and is maintained amongst tribal members to this day. It has been recorded in a grammar and dictionary text produced by the University of California, Linguistics Division, in 1991. The State of California has designated an historic park, called Tomo Kahni, at the site of one of our larger villages, near Tehachapi. This site has extensive rock art and numerous grinding holes. The State of California is currently negotiating to acquire three other Kawaiisu rock art sites for state parks, one at the Antelope Valley Indian Museum near Palmdale, one near Rosemond and one at San Emigdio, directly south of Bakersfield. There are also extensive Kawaiisu village rock art sites at two local military installations: Edwards Air Force Base and Naval Weapons Center. These two can be viewed on private tours.

The Kawaiisu are unique amongst indigenous people because we have no migration story. From an anthropological standpoint, this means we have always lived in the same place. Even some of the most studied of the ancient civilizations in the America's, for example the Aztec, have a migration story that was passed down to each generation thru oral history. This lack of a migration story explains why the Kawaiisu territorial pictographs are often pre-dated by adjacent petroglyphs and geoglyphs. The combination of Kawaiisu pictographs and petroglyphs verify that our tribe has lived in this region since time immemorial.

The Kawaiisu have maintained an active government since the arrival of the Spanish. Tribal elders have fostered continuous government-to-government relationships with each country (Spain, Mexico, U.S.) and governing agency since then. The tribe today has an elected tribal

council of five members, with a general council of 30 adult voting members. We have roll numbers and allotments. The United States has failed to put our tribe on the Federal Register and as a result, many members live in extreme poverty without running water or electricity. In spite of hardship we maintain our culture and traditional ceremonies. Our tribal community is one of the most cohesive groups in the Indian world today. We are incorporated in California and will soon complete our 501C3 paperwork so that we are registered as non-profit at the federal level.

**History: 1776 - Father Garces documents the boundaries of the Kawaiisu territory**

When the Spaniards arrived in the Americas they brought Franciscan and Jesuit monks to explore and survey the new lands Spain had conquered. The territories delineated by the priests became Spain's guideline for mapping ancestral Native American lands. Father Francisco Garces was one of the Franciscan monks. He became the first European to document contact with the Kawaiisu people and the extent of our tribal territory. His diaries record two trips in 1776, where he encountered several of the rancherias of our tribe. Using the diaries of Father Garces and cross referencing the 1965 Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology resource called "Handbook of American Indians," you will discover that the Kawaiisu were described as Cobaji, Cobajais, Cuabajai, Quabajai, Nochi, Noche and Noches Colteches. These tribal designations are indicated on maps that illustrate the 1776 travels of Father Garces. One of these maps is stored at the University of Arizona Library and is available to view on the Internet. The map shows the route Father Garces took and illustrates the extent of the tribal territory that Father Garces described.

R. S. Felipe refers to the name Father Garces gave to what later became the Kern River. Our tribe is listed as Cobaji, Nochi and Quabajai and shows a territory that spans an area from Death Valley in the east, across the Tehachapi Mountain range and west to the Pacific Ocean.

The Kawaiisu territory delineated by Father Garces was acknowledged by the Spanish government and became a permanent land grant. Years later, when Mexico acquired Spanish territories their laws guaranteed our Spanish land grant and rancharia ownership. (The relevant laws are called Recopilacion de las Indias, Bk. 4, Tit. 12, Laws 5, 7, 9, 14, 18; Bk. 6, Tit. 3, Law 9; Hall, Mexican law, 36, 38, 40, 45, 49, 165; 2 White's New Recopilacion, pp. 50, 52, 242.) In 1848, when the United States acquired the territory at the end of the Mexican War, these Spanish and Mexican laws were guaranteed by treaty. Articles VIII and IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed ancestral Native American lands and eventually led the U.S. Government to initiate what are known as the "18 Treaties of California."

**History: June 10, 1851 - The Kawaiisu sign Treaty D, one of the 18 California Treaties**

Between 1848 and 1851, the Kawaiisu found themselves in the middle of a five way conflict: A) The U.S. Federal Government establishing new western territories. B) Business investors trying to secure mining, oil and water rights. C) California politicians who were seeking statehood. D) The Euro-American population who did not understand the aboriginal language or customs and wanted the Indians removed from the region. E) The Indian nations of California who wanted to live undisturbed in their ancestral homelands.

As an early result of these conflicts, the Kawaiisu Tribe agreed to enter into a treaty with the United States, ceding their huge Spanish land grant for a smaller reserved tract. The tribal village Chairmen signed with both their Spanish and Indian names. The signing took place on June 10,

1851 at old Tejon (Texon) Pass, which was southwest of the old Tejon ranch headquarters. The reserved tract included all of the southern San Joaquin Valley and surrounding mountains. A map on the American Memory web site shows the original Spanish land grant held by the signing tribal members and ceded by this treaty. It looks just like the travel maps from Father Garces, showing a territory which extends from Death Valley in the east, across the San Joaquin Valley to the Pacific Ocean on the west and is listed as #286. This treaty was essentially a quitclaim deed where we gave up the rights to several million acres, in exchange for exclusive control over 1.2 million acres. The 1.2 million acres that were to remain reserved for tribal jurisdiction are shown on the same American Memory government map as #285. The treaty describes reserved tract #285 as follows:

"beginning at the first forks of Kern River...thence...to the Carises Lake, thence to Buena Vista Lake, thence a straight line from...Buena Vista Lake to the nearest point of the coast range of mountains, thence along the base of said range to the mouth or westerly terminus of the Tejon Pass or Canon, and from thence a straight line to the beginning..."

We signed the treaty in good faith and were never told that our treaty was secretly shelved after the United States Senate reviewed it and bowed to pressure from legislators and investors from California. The U.S. Government and The State of California acted together, in bad faith, by doing nothing to keep their own internal and political conflicts from impacting the peaceful lives of the Kawaiisu Tribe as they continued to live on their ancestral homeland.

As the stories of California's resources traveled east, wagon trains of new settlers arrived. These easterners were seeking a good life with dreams of land ownership at bargain prices. The Kawaiisu were living and maintaining the terms of the treaty, yet miners, ranchers and settlers were encroaching on our territory. Our tribe did not understand why this was happening. It created a politically charged climate, inflamed when European men sexually brutalized our women and children and senselessly killed thousands of Indians to remove them from the land.

The United States was slow to step in and save us even though the military had ongoing communication from California about the slaughters. Finally, on March 3, 1853 (10 Stat. 226, 238) Congress passed a bill to establish and fund five reservations in California for the protection of the Indians. The first reservation was the Tejon Reservation (also called Sebastian Reservation) which was established in September 1853. It contained 75,000 acres which was surveyed and funded for that purpose.

A map on the American Memory web site shows the reservation in September 1853 as #311.

On March 3, 1855 (10 Stat. 686, 699) Congress passed another Indian funding bill that reduced each California reservation to only 25,000 acres. Tejon Reservation was funded again but it was not re-surveyed to reflect the reduced size, even though the Secretary of the Interior made that order on November 25, 1856.

Since that time there is no Congressional or Presidential record indicating that the Tejon Reservation was terminated or abolished. There is no record that the Kawaiisu Tribe of Tejon was terminated. In fact, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had ongoing dialogue regarding the Tejon Indians well into the 1940's. In December 1915 a BIA agent noted there were 79 Indians

living at Tejon Reservation and in October 1918 a BIA agent from the Tule River Agency noted there were 80. The BIA sent correspondence discussing 12,000 acres for the Tejon Indians and in the 1920's built an Indian school on the Tejon Reservation. In November 1924 the BIA Commissioner noted 75 Indians, 20 of which attended the school on the reservation. The Indian school was in operation on the reservation until 1945 when the teacher there retired and the Tejon Indian children had to be transferred to other Kern County schools. The local paper photographed an Indian burial on the reservation in 1964 and at least one descendant is still living there.

It is not surprising then that the United States government issued trust lands to our tribal members. These allotments are located throughout the original Spanish land grant territory. Some of these allotment lands are currently active and many have been stolen "by peaceful means."

### **History: June 1924 - Supreme Court rules against Indians in favor of Tejon Ranch owners**

The destiny of the Kawaiisu Tribe has been impacted by a Southern California land and mineral rights grab, calculated to take advantage of the history of the times and the long distance between California and the east coast seat of the U.S. Government. First of all, California was lobbying to be accepted into the Union as a state. The California State Legislature voted in their constitution in December 1849, but did not become part of the Union until September 1850. California legislators and business investors knew that when a state enters the Union an Enabling Act is agreed to, allowing the new state to appropriate unpatented lands. They were also well aware that a large part of California's open land was covered by Spanish land grants to Native Americans.

The politicians in California worked quickly to create a new law that guaranteed the outright theft of Native American ancestral homeland. The law was called "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (Chapter 133, Statutes of California, April 22, 1850). Even though Union politics had determined that California could not legalize slavery, pro-slavery supporters in the legislature found a way to get around the restriction. The "Act for the Government and Protection of Indians" amounted to an Indian slavery law. This law expanded the peonage system of free Indian labor for mining and cattle interests. It also denied an Indian the right to testify against a white person and made sure that the local constable notified Indians of their new status.

Eleven months later, the U.S. Congress passed the Enabling Act California politicians and investors had been lobbying for. The "Act of March 3, 1851" (C.41, 9 Stat 631) assigned a two year commission to review California's Spanish land grants and had the commission hold court in San Francisco. All Spanish and Mexican land grant holders were required to present their land claims to the commission or abandon their rights forever. California Indians were never informed about the San Francisco land commission hearings. They also had other restrictions that prevented their appearance. Under the new California "Indian slave law" they were being collected for free labor, rounded up and beaten or executed if they resisted. As such our tribe never presented our claim to the commission, nor did the United States appear before the commission as a trustee for us.

Seventy years later, in 1924, the Supreme Court decided a case in favor of Title Insurance and Trust Company, a water, oil and newspaper syndicate which held the Tejon Ranch patent. The Supreme Court held that by not appearing before the commission the Indians had voluntarily

abandoned their claim to the land. Twenty years later, in the 1940's, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was using this case to deny federal recognition and services to our tribe.

This legal proceeding should have been reviewed and reversed long ago. When it was filed in 1920 and decided in 1924, Native Americans were still prevented from testifying on their own behalf. Because we had no input, many of the facts the court needed were never told. The Tejon Ranch patent in question had been acquired and packaged by Edward F. Beale. Beale was the officer who managed the Tejon Indian Reservation after he became the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in February 1852. Beale enslaved the Indians and kept them from the San Francisco commission hearings. He collected Tejon Reservation funds from the government and began to acquire the land surrounding the reservation. He was removed from his Bureau of Indian Affairs position in 1854 but gained the support of California politicians. In 1856 California Governor Johnson commissioned Lieutenant Beale as a Brigadier General and sent him fully empowered to make war on Southern California tribes who were causing trouble. To carry out the views of the Governor, General Wool gave authority to General Beale to draw forces from Fort Tejon for that purpose. Soon a group of California politicians and investors wrote to President Lincoln and recommended him for a new position. In July 1861, Lincoln appointed Beale to the position of Surveyor-General of California. In this position, Beale was in charge of surveying and approving land patents. In the 2.5 years Beale was employed as Surveyor-General thousands of acres of land patents were approved in his name, land that had originally belonged to Native Americans. The very land patent in question, in this Supreme Court case, had the Beale Surveyor-General stamp of approval. The Supreme Court referred to an 1863 patent to a Mexican grantee, but records show Beale was already the owner at that time. It was also common knowledge that he moved the property lines and thereby manipulated the titles. A simple review of Spanish/Mexican "rancho" property law and how boundaries of "ranchos" and "rancherias" interact would have brought his surveys into question. The Title Insurance and Trust Company was never asked to prove those boundaries. The tarnished reputation of General Beale quickly caught up with him. On February 17, 1864 President Lincoln fired Beale because of misappropriation of Indian funds. Beale was supposed to return to Washington to give President Lincoln property deeds from the ranchos and Native American land surrounding the Tejon reservation. Instead Beale contacted President Lincoln and said he had lost the deeds. President Lincoln removed Beale from office but no government agency stepped in to ensure that the Tejon Indians were protected. After losing his job, Beale joined investors to form the Star Oil Company and claimed that all of the Tejon Indians had been transferred to the Tule Reservation. BIA correspondence discounts Beale's claim. Well into the 1920's, a Tule River Indian Agency agent and a BIA Commissioner verified numerous Indians remaining to run the Tejon Reservation cattle ranch, farming and mining operation. After Beale died the family sold the ranch to the Title Insurance and Trust Company who then took steps to evict the Indian reservation residents. They even tricked the Indians into believing they had to pay the ranch rent so they would not lose their land or jobs. When the Indians could not afford to pay the rent the company used non-payment to go after the property by "peaceful means."

### **Creating an economic development plan for the Kawaiisu Tribe**

In order to fight poverty and prevent the deterioration of our culture and language, the Kawaiisu Tribe of Tejon need to be federally recognized. Legal precedent seems to indicate a favorable outcome if we choose to pursue recognition. In one Supreme Court example called *Mattz vs.*

Arnett, 412 U.S. 481 (1973), the unanimous court ruled that the allotment provisions of the Act of June 17, 1892 are completely consistent with continued reservation status. In other words, by issuing allotments the Department of Interior and Congress are continuing to recognize the existence of a tribe and its reservation. In that Supreme Court case the existence of allotments reversed termination, led to the tribe's Federal Recognition and delineated "Indian Country" for the tribe. An area is typically designated "Indian Country" when it is an aboriginal territory that has been demonstrated to offer long standing cultural significance to the tribe. This covers ancestral activities such as hunting and fishing, traditional ceremonies like our annual pinoning and most important in our case, the significant rock art which our tribe has maintained since time immemorial. The courts have a record of designating "Indian Country" as the land base that "is" deeded to the tribe or that "once was" deeded to the tribe such as: English land grants, Mexican land grants and Spanish land grants. If we choose to investigate these legal avenues and prevail, the tribe will be able to develop a viable plan for the future. This will begin with running water and electricity and will eventually extend to healthcare, cultural enrichment and formal education for our children.

### **Biography**

David Laughing Horse Robinson is a direct descendant and elected Chairman of the Kawaiisu Tribe. He is an accomplished artist who uses steel sculpture and etchings to convey the Native American symbols which are commonly used in Kawaiisu rock art. Laughing Horse has been researching and documenting Kawaiisu solar and lunar calendars for the past 15 years. He is in the process of presenting his research in documentary video format, translating the scientific data recorded on petroglyphs and pictographs. The first documentary will explain the history of why rock art exists in the America's and why they occur where they do. Kate DeVries is the primary historian and researcher for the Kawaiisu Tribe. She is a video producer with eighteen years experience writing, shooting and editing for television. Kate is writing the scripts for the upcoming documentaries about the solar and lunar calendars of the Kawaiisu Tribe.

### **For more information on the Kawaiisu Tribe of Tejon**

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**Or e-mail: [horserobinson@hotmail.com](mailto:horserobinson@hotmail.com)**

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**Quincy D. Newell. Constructing Lives at Mission San Francisco: Native Californians and Hispanic Colonists, 1776-1821. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009. x + 267 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-4706-0.**

Reviewed by William Bauer (University of Nevada, Las Vegas)

Published on H-AmIndian (March, 2011)

Commissioned by Patrick G. Bottiger

For much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, California Indian studies has been concerned with two lines of historical inquiry. For one, scholars have debated the treatment of California Indians in the missions that Spanish Franciscan priests created along the California coast. There has been a host of mission apologists (such as Father Francis Guest), ardent critics (such as Rupert Costo [Cahuila] and Jeanette Costo [Eastern Cherokee]), and people who have sought a middle ground between those polarized opinions (notable recent studies include those of

Steven Hackel and James Sandos).[1] In addition to thorough investigations of the mission system, California Indian scholars have used the methods of social history to understand the ways in which the Indigenous people survived the cultural encounter in California. Dating back to biologist Sherburne Cook's examination of California Indian demography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continuing in Albert Hurtado's award-winning study of California Indians in the gold rush, California Indian scholars have utilized censuses, birth and death registers, and other sources that, in the capable hands of social historians, revolutionized United States historiography.[2] Religious Studies scholar Quincy Newell brings both lines of inquiry together in her engaging and imaginative study of Mission San Francisco Asis.

Newell's work clearly fits in the camp of those ethnohistorians who examine both sides of the mission experience in California. Her title explicitly brings Native Californians and Hispanics into conversation and the process of building lives in a new world. Newell seeks to "reveal the resourcefulness and flexibility that Bay Area Indians displayed as they responded to the Franciscans' missionary efforts and constructed their lives in and around the missions" (p. 3). Words and phrases customary to ethnohistory and the now decades-old "new Indian history" figure prominently on the pages of the book. Newell describes Natives as "adapting" to new ceremonies, labor practices, family patterns, marriage practices, kinship relations and opportunities for mobility. Further, she seeks to reveal "concealed" narratives about Native peoples (p. 3). Newell's examination of *compadrazgo* (the twinned practices of godparenthood and coparenthood) in the missions demonstrates the book's strengths as a work of ethnohistory. Rather than discussing how Spaniards became godparents to Native children, as historian James Brooks did in New Mexico, Newell examines those Indigenous people who became godparents at San Francisco.[3] Newell finds that the average godparent had ten to eleven godchildren. Yet, certain Natives at San Francisco stood over a plurality of godparent ceremonies. Diego Olvera, a native from Mexico and a servant at San Francisco, had 463 godchildren. His wife Ubiumis, from the Native village Yelamu near the mission, had more than 300. Jacinto, an interpreter, had 164. Native people in the Bay Area selected potential godparents to reinforce personal alliances between people and augment kinship ties that were weakening because of the onslaught of disease.

Newell's work also applies social history methods to California Indian history. The primary sources that Newell uses are death and birth registers from Mission San Francisco. Rather than reproducing a text of dry statistics or lists of California Indians at the missions, Newell uncovers "hidden biographies" from these texts. This imaginative writing enlivens the analysis of the book. In order to examine the interplay between California Indians and the Catholic ceremonies, Newell uses the baptism of Pismote on December 23, 1782. Newell describes what Pismote must have experienced on that December day, such as the incoherent pomp and circumstance as well as sights, smells, and tastes of a Catholic baptism ceremony. Unfortunately, we lose sight of the biographies when Newell discusses labor practices at San Francisco. Thankfully, she returns to the biography of Keqecég, a Ssalson, to reveal the ways in which Native Californian families changed at Mission San Francisco. On the whole, Newell wonderfully weaves together an anecdotal narrative with those familiar (but sometimes dry) social history sources.

In the end, Newell offers an important contribution to the study of California Indians, missions, and social history. Readers gain an important understanding of an understudied mission in the state. In this way, Newell heeds the recent words of another California Indian historian, George Harwood Phillips, who writes, "Even within a particular region, such as California, the way each mission was managed and the particular economic programs introduced--and thus the quality of life experienced by the Indians--varied." [4] Perhaps Newell could have strengthened the book by more explicitly addressing the uniqueness of Mission San Francisco Asis. In what ways did missions in the San Francisco Bay Area--including the nearby Mission San Francisco de Solano--differ from those in at San Gabriel or Los Angeles? This comment notwithstanding, Newell has produced a wonderful study of California Indian mission life.

#### Notes

- [1]. See, for instance, Francis Guest, "An Examination of the Thesis of S.F. Cook and the Forced Conversion of Indians in the California Missions," *Southern California Quarterly* 61 (Spring 1979): 1-77; Rupert Costo and Jennette Costo, eds., *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1987); James Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Steven Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- [2]. Sherburne Cook, *The Conflict between the California Indians and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 1942); and Albert Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
- [3]. James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- [4]. George Harwood Phillips, *Vineyards and Vaqueros: Indian Labor and the Economic Expansion of Southern California, 1771-1877* (Norman: Arthur H. Clark, 2010), 21.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: William Bauer. Review of Newell, Quincy D., *Constructing Lives at Mission San Francisco: Native Californians and Hispanic Colonists, 1776-1821*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. March, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32136>

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### **Wounded Knee Massacre Coverup Blamed Indians for Butchery By Lewis Lapham - Jan 13, 2012 9:01 PM PT**

The massacre at Wounded Knee, [South Dakota](#), on Dec. 29, 1890 left most of the frightened and destitute band of 350 Lakota Sioux dead or wounded, including women and nursing babies, children and the elderly. Some were shot in the back as they tried to flee. A number of soldiers were killed by friendly fire.

(To listen to the podcast, click [here](#).)

[Audio Download: Wounded Knee Massacre Coverup Blamed the Indians](#)



Lewis Lapham, of "Lapham's Quarterly," in New York. For "A World in Time" he interviews authors to give current events an historical context. Photographer: Paul Goguen/Bloomberg

Appalled by the carnage, including the loss of 25 of his own men, General Nelson Miles investigated, zeroing in on the bungling of the Seventh Cavalry's Col. James Forsyth. Soldiers came to his defense, saying that they couldn't tell the men from the women since all were wearing blankets, and that, in any case, "A Sioux squaw is as bad an enemy as a man."

When the report was sent to Secretary of War Redfield Proctor, General John Schofield, the Commander of the Army, attached a note saying the troops had clearly bent over backwards to avoid killing women and children, while also denying that any troops had died in friendly fire.

The final report exonerated U.S. soldiers and blamed the massacre on the Sioux themselves, with many of the dead women and children supposedly killed by other Indians.

For conspicuous bravery, 20 soldiers present at the massacre were awarded the Medal of Honor.

I spoke with Heather Cox Richardson, author of "Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre," on the following topics:

1. Destitute Refugee Band
2. Corrupt Election
3. Ghost Dance
4. Death of Sitting Bull
5. Spinning the Massacre

To buy this book in [North America](#), click [here](#).

([Lewis Lapham](#) is the founder of [Lapham's Quarterly](#) and the former editor of Harper's magazine. He hosts "The World in Time" interview series for Bloomberg News.)

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**Showing 3 of 7 comments on Wounded Knee Massacre Coverup Blamed Indians for Butchery:  
Lewis Lapham**

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**CORRECTED-Arctic sea ice likely to hit record low next week** **Mon Aug 20, 2012**

(Corrects name of agency to U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center, instead of U.S. National Climate Data Center, in first paragraph)

- \* Unprecedented lows would beat 2007 mark
- \* Early melting set the stage, August saw quick thaw

By Deborah Zabarenko

WASHINGTON, Aug 20 (Reuters) - Sea ice in the Arctic Ocean is likely to shrink to a record small size sometime next week, and then keep on melting, a scientist at the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center said on Monday.

"A new daily record ... would be likely by the end of August," said Ted Scambos, lead scientist at the data center, which monitors ice in the Arctic and elsewhere. "Chances are it will cross the previous record while we're still in sea ice retreat."

The amount of sea ice in the Arctic is important because this region is a potent global weather-maker, sometimes characterized as the world's air conditioner. This year, the loss of sea ice in the Arctic has suggested a possible opening of the Northwest Passage north of Canada and Alaska and the Northern Sea Route by Europe and Siberia. As parts of the Arctic melted, 2012 also set records for heat and drought in much of the Northern Hemisphere temperate zone, especially the continental United States.

This summer could see the ice retreat to less than 1.5 million square miles (4 million square km), an unprecedented low, Scambos said.

The previous record was set in 2007, when Arctic ice cover shrank to 1.66 million square miles (4.28 million square km), 23 percent below the earlier record set in 2005 and 39 percent below the long-term average from 1979 to 2000.

However, 2007 was a jaw-dropping "perfect storm" of conditions that primed the area for thawing sea ice: warmer and sunnier than usual, with extremely warm ocean water and winds all working together to melt the Arctic.

Last year, Arctic sea ice extended over the second-smallest area on record, but that was considered to be closer to a "new normal" rather than the extreme conditions of 2007, NSIDC said then.

This year is similar to 2011, Scambos said by telephone from Colorado. The melt season started between 10 days to two weeks earlier than usual in some critical areas including northern Europe and Siberia.

## **SIGNS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

If the sea ice record is broken this month, that would be unusually early in the season; last year's low point came on Sept. 9, 2011.

Typically, the melting of Arctic sea ice slows down in August as the Northern Hemisphere moves toward fall, but this year, it has speeded up, Scambos said. "I doubt there's been another year that had as rapid an early August retreat," he said.

Overall, the decline of Arctic sea ice has happened faster than projected by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change five years ago, according to NSIDC data ( [here](#) ).

To Scambos, these are clear signs of climate change spurred by human activities, notably the emission of heat-trapping greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide.

"Everything about this points in the same direction: we've made the Earth warmer," he said.

This summer has also seen unusual melting of the ice sheet covering Greenland, with NASA images showing that for a few days in July, 97 percent of the northern island's surface was thawing. The same month also saw an iceberg twice the size of Manhattan break free from Greenland's Petermann Glacier.

The change is apparent from an NSIDC graphic showing current Arctic ice cover compared with the 1979-2000 average, Scambos said. The graphic is online at [nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/](http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/).

"What you're seeing is more open ocean than you're seeing ice," he said. "It just simply doesn't look like what a polar scientist expects the arctic to look like. It's wide open and the (ice) cap is very small. It's a visceral thing. You look at it and that just doesn't look like the Arctic Ocean any more." (Editing by Doina Chiacu)

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## **Hang Out with the Manatees**

How'd you like to win an all-expenses-paid kayaking trip for two to Florida's fabulous Everglades? You'll explore one of the largest expanses of mangrove estuary in North America -- home to dolphins, manatees, and sea turtles.

All you have to do is [upload a photo of your favorite piece of America](#), and you could be on your way to this subtropical paradise with Sierra Club Outings.

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## **Ready for Back-to-School? Begin the Year as a Connected Educator!**

Did you know that August is Connected Educator Month? Find out how the Department of Education is connecting educators of all disciplines and levels collaborate online—it's not too late to participate! [Read More](#)

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## **[In the Shadow of Wounded Knee - Pictures, More From National Geographic Magazine](#)**

[ngm.nationalgeographic.com](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com)

After 150 years of broken promises, the Oglala Lakota people of the Pine Ridge R...See More [Anne-Louise Susan](#) shared [Center for Native American Youth's photo](#).

**This is an awesome resource.**