

The Catch

WHY MEASURE?

FORT COLLINS, CO — Friday, May 13, 2005

Wow, what rain!

I don't listen to the news or watch the weather very much, but I sure was glad I happened to click on the CoCoRaHS maps this evening and decided to click on Nebraska (go to www.cocorahs.org and click on Nebraska on the National map). I then selected "Maps" and clicked to view the 24-hour precip. totals ending at 7 AM today (Thurs, May 12). I am fairly color blind and have trouble distinguishing several colors, but right away I thought I detected something different. Sure enough, parts of Nebraska had over 10 inches of rain yesterday—most falling Weds evening. Also, there were mucho hail reports—MUCHO! Put it together and Nebraska had one doozy of a bad weather day. I counted a total of 32 reports of over 5 inches of rain, with ten of them exceeding 8 inches in 24 hours. That's a lot of water no matter where you are on our planet. The largest report was an exceptional 11.33" at the Kenesaw 2.4 W station in Adams County, NE.

I just want to congratulate Rich, Marlene, and several others with the Nebraska Dept. of Natural Resources and their Natural Resource District staff. They took our CoCoRaHS ideas and implemented them masterfully across portions of Nebraska to set up a superb volunteer network which they proudly call NeRAIN—pronounced "Any Rain?" NeRAIN stands for "Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network"

The huge effort of recruiting and training volunteers over thousands of square miles all pays off on days like yesterday. The detailed maps today painted a fine picture of where the heaviest storms occurred and how much rain actually fell. Also, many volunteers sent in storm reports that helped the National Weather Service keep ahead of these systems and kept the public warned of the severe weather and local flash floods.

The impressive part of the Nebraska network, NeRAIN, is it's relative uniform distribution of stations in most counties. They took special pains to personally recruit volunteers in order to get a fairly uniform spatial distribution. This is much better than what we have accomplished so far in Colorado where our stations are all clumped around our cities.

It is still green

Here at my house, we picked up 1.37" of rain, mostly Tuesday night and during the day on Wednesday. Our yard and pasture are wonderfully green, the air is cool and damp, and memories of the extreme drought of recent years are beginning to fade. I love it! Even in north central Wyoming, where some of the most extreme drought conditions of all of the western U.S. had been lingering until recently, heavy rains poured down and mountain snow piled up. Just since May 1, parts of Sheridan and Johnson Counties have picked up close to 6 inches of rain or wet snow. This is good news for ranchers, but enough rains have fallen that serious flooding was occurring in some areas.

Hail reports:

Another "Wow" is in order. There have been some whopping big hail storms already this year witnessed by some of you. We truly appreciate your diligence in measuring and reporting. We've seen lots of ping-pong ball sized hail already. On Tuesday afternoon, several reports of 2" diameter hail came into us including reports from the normally hail-safe Longmont area. So much for thinking we know more than Mother Nature.

Importance of hail and intense rain reports

I've said it before and I'll say it again. As much as we appreciate and make use of your daily precipitation reports, we appreciate it even more at this time of year when you are able to submit "Intense Rain" and "Hail" reports. These are important for understanding the climate of severe weather here in the West, but they are even more important because some storm reports may result in National Weather Service issuing or verifying severe thunderstorm and flash flood warnings. This could save lives. So please don't take this lightly. IF YOU ARE AT HOME WHEN YOU OBSERVE INTENSE RAIN, LOTS OF HAIL, OR EVEN AN TORNADO, THEN PLEASE SUBMIT A REPORT. If you are interested, we strongly encourage you to become an NWS severe weather spotter, as well as a CoCoRaHS precipitation measurer. Remember, there is no great rush for you to get your damaged hail pads turned in to us after storms, but there is great urgency to get your hail and heavy rain reports submitted promptly. These are helpful and interesting to us, but they may make a huge difference for the NWS and others.

What next: Help needed

We continue to look for one or more volunteers to serve as local contact points for new volunteers and distributors of hail pads in Weld County, Colorado. We also have a new opening in Park County, Colorado. There are many openings in surrounding states as well. If you would like to help, please let us know. Now that we have grown and spread so far, are especially important for the project.

Training Sessions next week.

I will be in Sterling, Colorado on May 17th for the Children's Water Festival during the day and then a 4-6 PM CoCoRaHS training session at the Logan County Cooperative Extension Office, 508 S. 10th Street. Please come if you are in short driving range and in need of training and/or supplies.

On Thursday, May 19th, there will be a training session in Lakewood, Colorado 7-9 PM at the Lakewood Public Library, 10300 20th Avenue.

Still having Trouble with the website?

It looks like a few of you have given up and quit reporting since we installed the new website. Please don't give up. We are doing everything we can to make this work. Julian has finally figured out why folks with older operating systems on Macintosh computers have been having trouble logging in. That should be fixed soon. We will continue to make other changes, too, until the system works as well as possible for as many of us as possible. I know change is hard, and we haven't done everything quite as well as we should have, but please bear with us. We'll get there.

Why Measure? Why CoCoRaHS?

We continue to get questions from so many people learning about our network. Why are we doing this? And why does it matter? It is too late to answer right now, but in the days ahead I plan to send out a full explanation of why we are measuring, what we are learning, and what we still need to study.

Best wishes to all of you—whether wet or dry. Keep your good reports coming!!

Nolan Doesken