

COCORAHS UPDATE—WE SURVIVED GROUNDHOG DAY

FORT COLLINS, CO — Friday, February 3, 2006

Hello everybody:

In the world of meteorology, Ground Hog day is one of those significant days with little significance. A news reporter called me to discuss the occasion but instead of asking me if we would have 6 more weeks of winter, she asked "Has Phil signed up for CoCoRaHS yet?" That was quite a shock, but I guess many folks have heard about CoCoRaHS, so maybe it was a logical question. The answer was "not yet", but I sure would be curious to know what she wrote in that article. If anyone saw that paper, let me know.

So far, 767 of us sent in precipitation reports for the 24-hour period ending at or about 7 AM on Feb 2 Ground Hog Day and 157 of us had measurable precipitation. I was not one of them. In fact, our dry spell in north Fort Collins (Colorado) continues. Since October 22 we've only received 0.55" of precip at my house and 5.7" of snow. At the official National Weather Service long-term weather station on the Colorado State University campus, the precipitation total for this same 105 day period is 0.53" (about 25% of average) with a total of only 4.7" of snow. This is BY FAR THE LEAST snow I have experienced in my 29 winters here in northern Colorado, and the record books show it's been 70 years since a winter was this snow free here. Thankfully we had some good rain in October, so the subsurface soil moisture is still decent.

Meanwhile, some of you up in the mountains of central and northern Colorado and western Wyoming are laughing like crazy (If you like snow, that is). Some of you have gotten at least 4.7" every few days for as long as you can remember. I notice that several of you are close to 200" of snowfall for the current season, and there are still many weeks to go.

Down south, our friends in southern New Mexico had their string of 100 dry days come to an end last week when a little shower crossed Deming, Las Cruces, and Alamogordo on the night of Jan 24th. That rain must have smelled good, but now it's been dry again every day since. Thanks to all of you down there who have continued to faithfully report despite the fact there was nothing to report. Typically at least 130 of you report your zeroes every day rain or shine -- mostly shine. Good job!!

How about back east? The network of CoCoRaHS observers in PA, VA and MD continues to grow -- slowly but surely. There have been very few snowstorms

there so far this winter, but the rain sure adds up a lot faster than it does out here. During the same 100+ days where it barely rained in New Mexico, MD has had 11-14" of moisture. Farther north in eastern PA the totals have been greater with two stations over 16". Now I understand why they have such green grass and dense trees :-)

New states have joined -- time to sign up

I am pleased to announce that we're starting to get volunteers signing up from Indiana. Call the relatives and spread the news :-). The National Weather Service and the State Climatologist at Purdue Univ. are teaming up to launch the network. The first Indiana training session will be at the Marion County Extension Office in Indianapolis on Monday afternoon, Feb. 6th (Click "Indiana" on the CoCoRaHS national map for more details.)

Also, as of this morning, Missouri is now a full participant in CoCoRaHS. They will begin recruiting and training volunteers shortly with the Univ. of Missouri serving as the state coordinator. We are delighted -- that's our 11th state.

New Maps—Total Depth of Snow on Ground

If all works as planned, when you visit the CoCoRaHS website this weekend, there will be a new option for maps to display. As we've watched the snow accumulate in the mountains we've been wanting to see a map of just how deep it is. Starting tomorrow under "Maps" you will see a selection option for "Total Snow Depth". I know that quite a few of us just report "NA" even when there is no snow on the ground, but for all of you up in the mountains reporting 24", 36", 48" or even more snow on the ground, it is going to be really neat to see and compare your data. For example, I've been tracking the two stations in Eagle County, Colorado near Vail. The station east of Vail has been reporting more snowfall, but less total depth than the station just SW of Vail. I looked at the location of each station and then it made sense. The station SW of Vail gets a little less snowfall, but the depth is greater since the station is protected and shaded on a north-facing slope. Meanwhile the station east of Vail gets more snow being closer to Vail Pass, but the snow accumulation is less since the site is much more exposed and gets direct sunshine on a south-facing slope. Today the total depth of snow differs by 20 inches between the two stations that are not that far apart. This will give us one more way to view and interpret the important data you help collect.

Monthly Totals

We are using your data more and more in various studies and climate summaries. Each month we are preparing summaries of monthly precipitation totals by county. CoCoRaHS data quality is good enough that we can incorporate our summaries with data from the National Weather Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Together, we can track precipitation patterns pretty darn well.

We know that many of us do not have time to measure and report every day, and I understand. But if you are one of the several hundred observers who enter their data weeks to even months later, do try to update your reports early each month so we can make use of your data in our monthly climate studies. Thanks.

Fill up our gaps

When we surveyed dozens of our volunteers last year about what they like and dislike about CoCoRaHS, a common response was "We need more volunteers in our area so we can compare and contrast our measurements to other nearby areas." Well, I'm all for having more volunteers, too, so we can better study and map precipitation patterns. Already, we've noticed many interesting features some of which we already knew (such as SW Boulder, CO is much wetter than NE parts of town) and other things we didn't know (such as West and SW Greeley is also wetter than NE parts of town and the same is true in Fort Collins).

The best way to find some more volunteers and fill some of the gaps that we are curious about is to ask the folks we know that live in these areas and see if they would like to sign up. Just direct them to the CoCoRaHS website and click "Join CoCoRaHS" on the upper left hand menu bar.

New gauges for our 5 year + veterans

Several dozen of you are now in the "Elite" CoCoRaHS 5-year club -- meaning you've been taking daily precipitation observations for at least 5 years and are probably stuck in a terrible rut :-). But please know, we appreciate you a lot and depending on the location of your gauge and if you put Armorall or some other conditioner on it, you may have noticed that the gauge is becoming hazy and brittle. We would like to be able to help you out and provide a complimentary replacement so you can continue to take accurate measurements. Thanks to some generous sponsors and donors, we have a few such gauges in stock. Let us know if you need a replacement and we will try to provide. Shipping costs \$8 or else you may be able to get a gauge from your county coordinator. Of course, if you would like to purchase the gauge, we can always buy new supplies for others.

County Coordinators needed!!

Check the "Volunteer Coordinators" button on the left hand side of the website and you will see who are the CoCoRaHS leaders in your county. These are the people that really help us grow and strengthen the network. If you have a few spare hours each month and would like to assist in recruiting or training new volunteers, distributing supplies, helping with special research projects, checking data quality or just staying in touch with and encouraging your fellow weather observers in your county, then please let us know or contact your state coordinator. The bigger we get, the more important our local leaders become.

That's enough for now. Thanks again for your interest and attention. Please stay in touch, and continue to share your ideas and suggestions (and complaints) with us.

Have a great weekend. Spring is in sight!! But I have a feeling there are a few big storms still to come.

Nolan

P.S.: at least 25 CoCoRaHS volunteers stopped by to say "Hi" at our booth at the Colorado Farm Show. The biggest surprise was when one of our new volunteers from western Virginia showed up. That was a long trip!