

# The Catch

## **COCORAHS—IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR**

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Dear CoCoRaHS participants, onlookers, friends, family, etc.

It is nearly March and the wild weather of "almost spring" made a strong showing this past weekend. We had rain. We had snow. We had white-out conditions on the Great Plains. We had sleet and freezing rain. We had WIND and lots of it. And we even had lightning, thunder and hail.

When heavy rain or snow was falling, several of you tried out our new "Intense Precipitation" report—and that information is greatly appreciated by National Weather Service weather forecasters trying to track and verify storm patterns. Thanks very much and we hope you continue to let us know when precipitation is really coming down. But please remember, even if you send in an "Intense Precipitation" report to still transmit your regular "Daily Precipitation Report" at the appropriate time.

### **CoCoRaHS goes to Washington**

Henry, our CoCoRaHS National Coordinator, and I were pleased and honored to travel to Washington D.C. last week to give presentations on CoCoRaHS to the National Weather Service, the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Office of Education and the NOAA Education Council. We gave a CoCoRaHS seminar and mini training session at the NOAA Library, and signed up a few new volunteers. We also visited our Maryland CoCoRaHS state coordinator, some of our Virginia participants, and then we took a trip to Delaware to see if the "First State" is interested in joining. Sure enough, they may team up with New Jersey later this year to extend CoCoRaHS even farther east.

I can't begin to tell you what a neat feeling it is to see people in Washington DC and other parts of the country get excited about our little network of volunteers with plastic rain gauges and foil-wrapped Styrofoam carefully measuring precipitation. You all deserve a great deal of credit for making this possible. By

the way, it was cold and windy in Washington, and large piles of sleet still covered the ground from a major storm the previous week.

### **Here they come—welcome Nevada and Wisconsin**

Two more states join the CoCoRaHS team on March 1st. That also marks the beginning of our annual "March Madness" competition. With 17 states on board, we expect lively competition this year to see which state can sign up the most new volunteers. Our newest states—Nevada and Wisconsin—will be duking it out, but don't be surprised to see Illinois, Indiana and Montana making a run for it. And what about all of us here in Colorado? I'm sure we haven't exhausted the pool of potential weather observers. And then there's Texas. When the word gets out down there that we need help measuring precipitation, my guess is hundreds of Texans will be signing up. So this next month should be a lot of fun.

By the end of March, as the weather warms and the fear of slipping on snow and ice begins to fade, I'm looking forward to seeing 2000 or more reports coming in each day. We've dropped back to about 1500-1600 reports each day in January and February, but if we ever all checked our gauges and sent in our reports, there are over 3000 of us participating. Let's go for a new record.

### **Master Gardeners and other plant lovers needed for National Phenology Network!!**

10 days ago I sent out the first notice of the invitation we've received to participate in the new USA National Phenology Network. Here is the additional information I promised you. If you're not interested in plants, bugs, birds, etc and how they respond to the weather, then stop reading now. But if these things fascinate you and you are interested in helping another very important research project, then please read on. Also, please note that if you know of others who love tracking the seasonal patterns and changes of plants, insects, birds, etc. please make them aware of this opportunity. Participants from all 50 states are welcome!

Here is a letter of invitation from one of the founders of the National Phenology Network—Dr. Mark Schwartz from the Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In exchange for sharing this letter of invitation, Mark has agreed to be one of the first in Wisconsin to sign up for CoCoRaHS. This sounds like a good deal to me :-)

*Dear CoCoRaHS Weather Observer:*

*A new National environmental observation network, focused on biological events, is being launched this spring. The USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN) will engage*

observers from existing monitoring networks to create a nationwide network of several thousand sites measuring phenological events across the country. Weather observers are especially valuable to USA-NPN because the weather data you collect may help explain some of the plant behavior and changes.

Phenology is the study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events that are influenced by environmental changes, especially seasonal variations in temperature and precipitation driven by weather and climate. Wide ranges of phenomena are included, from first openings of leaf and flower buds, to insect hatchings and return of birds. Each one gives a ready measure of the environment as viewed by the associated organism. Thus, timings of phenological events are ideal indicators of the impact of local and global changes in weather and climate on the Earth's biosphere.

The USA-NPN is being created to facilitate collection and dissemination of phenological data to support climate and environmental research. Similar to how CoCoRaHS has become respected for precipitation monitoring, USA-NPN will serve as a resource for dynamic biological information.

USA-NPN will provide guidance to help you select and observe appropriate species at your location. Initially, the program will include indicator plants (lilacs or other species that facilitate comparisons between sites) and a small set of native plants especially suited to each region.

Phenology reporting networks have been in existence for decades in the USA, and some National Weather Service cooperative weather observers have participated. These networks will become a part of USA-NPN. Many other countries in the world have Phenology networks, such as Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

If you volunteer to join the USA-NPN, you will have the option to indicate your willingness to participate in just the indicator program (observing only one type of plant) or the full program (observing the indicator plant and several native species). The time requirement would be a few minutes each day during the leafing and flowering period in the spring, and (only if observing native plants) similar time during the leaf coloring period in autumn. Since it

will take several years for us to produce and provide cloned plants to new sites, these plants will be distributed to produce the broadest geographical coverage. We will offer alternative observation options to interested observers involving either existing plants at your sites or nearby, which would allow immediate participation starting in spring 2007. Instructions to obtain and plant specific species from a nursery will also be provided as an additional option. The USA-NPN observation program will be primarily designed to function using the Internet for providing instructions, gathering observations, and providing access to data. However, we will also provide a means for those without Internet access to fully participate.

You may indicate your willingness to become a USA-NPN observer in three ways:

1) *\*If you have access to the Internet,\** use the web page <http://www.npn.uwm.edu> to register. Be sure to include your name, full email address, mailing address, and CoCoRaHS station number. Place your number in the "comments" box. Your phone number, other information, or questions can also be listed in the "comments" box.

2) *\*If you do NOT have access to the Internet\*,* call (414) 229-2436 and provide the same information listed in "1" above.

3) *If the first two options do not work for you,* you can send the information listed in "1" above to:

Prof. Mark D. Schwartz  
Department of Geography  
UW-Milwaukee  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413

We hope that you will volunteer to be a part of the USA National Phenology Network, and will look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Schwartz

Co-Organizer, USA-NPN

Thanks for making it to the end of another long CoCoRaHS message. We are grateful for your participation, and we look forward to the end of winter and the beginning of an even more critical time of year for CoCoRaHS—thunderstorm season!

Go out and recruit a few more volunteers. Results of the "March Madness" recruiting competition will be posted each week (Friday mornings) on the "Message of the Day", and we'll send out the final results when all "votes" have been counted in early April.

Sincerely,

*Nolan Doesken*