

The Catch

COCORAHS—IT'S SHOW TIME!

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Hello CoCoRaHS participants, friends and family.

It IS show time! Spring weather—the greatest show on earth—has arrived in it's frightening yet captivating glory. Spring is here and the atmosphere is fired up. As the season transitions from winter towards summer, the atmosphere is warming, water vapor is increasing and thermal instability (vertical temperature profile cooling rapidly with height such that once the air begins to rise it remains warmer than the air around it so that it spontaneously continues to rise forming towering cumulonimbus clouds) has increased sharply, and the remnant cold air from the north clashes wildly with the rapidly warming air from the south. We and the measurements of precipitation that we make are always useful and important—but now even more so!

We had our first thunderstorm of the year on Friday evening here in Fort Collins. Our big white dog began quivering nearly an hour before the storm and pushed in the back door to hide in the laundry room. Our other dog followed me outside to watch the lightning and listen to the thunder—no fear at all. Dogs are just as different as people, I reckon. Alas, we have survived another winter and the next summer awaits us.

This is CoCoRaHS time!

This is the time when convective processes produce incredibly variable and often extreme rainfall variations. This is the time when in a matter of minutes a mild, fragrant spring day can turn terrible with hail and even tornadoes. This is the time when intense downpours can take tiny meandering streams and turn them into mighty torrents. And this is the time when if it doesn't rain, the young but thirsty spring plants with help from the sun can quickly parch the soil. Dry winds can fan furious wildfires. This is the time when there will be storms somewhere in the country every day—and our reports of rain, hail and snow could be the most important things we do. Yes, you are just a backyard volunteer, but your reports fan out quickly across the country. Every drop of rain may be significant, and every CoCoRaHS report could be the most important one of all.

Snow in Reno

Welcome all you new Nevada CoCoRaisins. Welcome aboard! Thanks for patiently waiting 21 days of March to get your first drops. That is the longest any new state has had to wait for their first CoCoRaHS measurable rain. Then last night Reno was greeted by a late season snow. Glad you folks are getting a chance to put your gauges to good use.

Storms in Texas

And then there's Texas. Texas is the CoCoRaHS sleeping giant. We're almost afraid what will happen when the word gets out that volunteers are needed. Texas is a crazy state when it comes to rain—huge rains over the eastern half of the state, huger yet over the SE, and then dry so much of the time over West Texas until the occasional monster storm erupts. Texas participation in CoCoRaHS has been growing slowly but steadily and now nearly 50 people report daily. There have been some amazing downpours already with several reports of rain exceeding 4" this month. This is just the beginning. It is not impossible for some parts of Texas to get up to 20" or more of rain in a day. Keep spreading the word. We'll get more gauges out there soon. We'll eventually help track these storms.

Wyoming—Drought

Snow storms, ice storms, thunderstorms—but not in Wyoming. Parts of the state have been in severe drought now for several years. This winter and early spring haven't helped much. But don't give up hope yet. The storm that is developing in the West right now could bring much needed precipitation to the state at a very critical time of year. Let's hope.

Illinois passes 100

Over 300 volunteers have signed up for CoCoRaHS in Illinois now, and applications keep streaming in every day. The average number of daily precipitation reports recently surpassed the 100 mark. It is so great to click on my old home state and be able to track the storm patterns each day. Did you see the flooding and hail reports a few days ago? The storms have been rolling.

2,000?? —SEND IN YOUR COCORAHS PRECIPITATION REPORT NOW!

Any day now we are going to reach the 2,000 mark – 2,000 volunteer precipitation reports per day. In fact, we could hit that number TOMORROW if we all just paid attention and remember to submit our reports. LET'S DO. Send in your report tomorrow and we'll see how many reports we can get. By best counts, well over 3500 of us have our rain gauges out right now so it's just a matter of having the discipline and patience to sit down at the computer and enter your reports.

Trouble Logging In??

Logging in is not hard, and our computer will remind you your password if you forget. Just hit "Login" and then "find my login" and we'll e-mail you your ID. If you are having troubles with this, please let us know. We don't want this to be the barrier keeping you from sharing your reports and participating in this project.

Hail reports

Remember to submit a "Hail Report" even if the hail is small and soft. We are not biased. Big Hail, Little Hail, Soft Hail, Hard Hail. We are interested in all hail. I've noticed that quite a few of you do a good job of mentioning hail in your daily precipitation report comments—and that's very good. But also fill out and submit a "Hail Report" using:

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/HailReport.aspx>

Then we are able to include your hail in our research. Remember when you report hail you report the actual date when the hail fell—no need to wait until the next AM.

By the way, we've already had 100 hail reports submitted this year of which 10% had stones of 1" diameter or greater. Tucumcari, NM got pounded March 23—dented cars, damaged roofs, broken windows—what a mess.

Also, thanks to those of you who have submitted "Intense Precipitation" reports in addition to your regular daily reports. Those are REALLY HELPFUL for weather forecasters, hydrologists, emergency managers, etc.

Where's My Station Name?

We try to carefully process all new applications to join CoCoRaHS within a few days of when you sign up. If it has been more than 3 weeks since you signed up and you still have not heard from us and still have not been issued a station name, then we must be having troubles. Please contact me and let me know. We'll figure it out!

March Madness—Last call!

We're coming down the home stretch—just 4 days left in our annual friendly competition to see what state can add the most new volunteers in one month. Kansas, Illinois and Wisconsin are doing great! But call your weather friends from Oklahoma. They are lagging behind. We're not exactly setting any records here in Colorado, either. I think Wyoming is pulling ahead of us. New applications must be received by midnight March 31 to be included in the final tally.

Signing off

Goodnight. I have much more to talk about, but it will have to wait a few days. Thanks again for sharing your interest in weather to help many of us track and study our storms. Your efforts—and even your good intentions—are much appreciated. I realize that getting up, getting out to the gauge, getting a good measurement and then getting it entered in the computer are all a bit harder than it seems. Measuring precipitation requires a certain amount of discipline before it becomes a natural habit. If you can do it and stick with it for a few weeks or months we all benefit. Give it a try if you haven't started yet.

Best wishes to all of you. Keep your eye on the sky.

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University