

The Catch

ALMOST AUTUMN—NEWS FROM COCORAHS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Friday, September 21, 2007

Greetings,

The first snow fell this week at a CoCoRaHS weather station. One of our highest elevation volunteers above the town of Breckenridge, Colorado at an elevation of 10,400 feet reported 1/2 inch of snow earlier this week. The aspen leaves are now turning and the mountain elk are bugling. This is actually a few days later than average for the first snow of the season, but it still seems too early. Like it or not, fall is nearly here.

Our Alaska volunteers are getting a rain gauge workout. The observer at Valdez hasn't missed a daily reported all month and has a total of 8.44" so far for September. Tennessee has AT LAST also enjoyed some rains with some areas picking up 3-4" in the past few weeks. But many stations from Illinois and Indiana eastward to Pennsylvania and Maryland have received less than 0.50" of rain all this month = well below their average. Flaxville, MT (check your geography) is one of our driest locations this month with a whopping 0.15" since Sept. 1.

THE NEW COCORAHS T-SHIRTS ARE NOW AVAILABLE TO ORDER!

Our new CoCoRaHS t-shirts have just come in and they look great! We have gone with a "one color on one color" design for a clean - crisp look this time using the classic "Because every drop counts!" design.

Ordering a shirt not only helps to support the program, but it is a great way to tell your friends and neighbors (and total strangers) about the network.

The shirts come in either navy or khaki and are available in Medium, Large, X-Large and XXL -- 100% preshrunk cotton. You can learn more by visiting: <http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=store>.

When ordering, make the check out to "CoCoRaHS" and send \$12 per shirt (\$14 for XXL) along with \$2 shipping per order to:

CoCoRaHS
T-Shirt Order
1371 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, CO 80523

The Blog has begun

Some of you may remember the name "Chris Spears". Chris was a meteorology student at Metropolitan State College in Denver who worked as a student intern to get CoCoRaHS started in the city. He now has his meteorology degree and some professional experience under his belt. Chris is still in the Denver area and has generously offered his expertise and writing abilities to start a nationwide CoCoRaHS blog. I'm not much of a blogger, but if you're interested in following along go to: <http://cocorahs.blogspot.com/>.

Chris will keep things very interesting and informative and will make it worth your while to read every day.

Some Tips for avoiding data errors

We are adding more observers every day, and some of us have never done "this weather reporting stuff" before. At the same time, scientists by the dozens are accessing CoCoRaHS and using our data each day. This presents a challenge. With so many beginners, there will be some mistakes and some bad data on our maps. It is inevitable, but our data users don't much like "bad data".

Some of the most common errors we are seeing include:

- 1) Total accumulation over a period of several days entered as a single daily precipitation amount.
- 2) Decimal point error. e.g.: five hundredths of an inch (0.05") entered as 0.50" OR 5.00" (heaven forbid, but it happens).
- 3) Wrong day error. This is most common for those of you who don't enter your data right away but instead come back a few days later to catch up. We may forget which day it fell or we might enter the amount for the day it fell rather than on the day you checked and emptied the gauge at 7 AM.
- 4) Time of day error -- that is when you check and read your gauge later in the day after an afternoon rain, but still enter 7 AM as your observation time.
- 5) Wrong place error. Some of us don't have correct latitude/longitude entries, so our data are not showing up in the right place on the maps.

How to avoid these top five errors

1) If rain fell over a period of days while you were away, then please use the "Multi Day Accumulation" entry form to report the total amount. The total will then be included in your station summary reports, but it won't show up as an erroneous point on the daily maps.

2) Keeping track of decimal points is your responsibility. Make sure you report accurately and check your amount before you enter it to make sure it is correct. If you do make a mistake and get the decimal point in the wrong place, just re-enter and correct the amount. We always recommend that you double check your entry. Even the most experienced observer will make a typing error now and then.

3) Remember, our daily reports cover the 24-hour period ending at or near 7 AM (or whatever your preferred observing time -- but 7 AM \pm an hour or two is our preference). If it rained yesterday afternoon, you report that amount this morning with today's date since it fell in the 24 hours ending at 7 AM today. If you are entering data from a few days ago, and aren't quite sure what day to report, please first look at the CoCoRaHS map for your state and county and see when others around you reported the rain. The maps are great for spotting errors and checking your data. Check the maps whenever you can.

4) Some of you get excited when there's a good rain falling. I don't blame you. In fact, we appreciate that. You might decide to send in a daily precipitation report for the rain that has fallen since 7 AM. Unfortunately, if it's still the same day, this entry will overwrite and replace the amount you previously entered at 7 AM that morning. So what should you do? We are interested in finding out how much rain you're having. The best thing to do is report an "Intense precipitation Report" using the special data entry form specifically for heavy rain or snow. You can use that form regardless of what time of day the rain or snow fell. Whenever you get at least 0.30" of rain in an hour in the drier states or at least 1.00"/hour in the wetter states -- or at least 2.00" of rain so far for the day, that justifies an intense rain report. We have different criteria for snow and we'll give them later this fall.

Intense precipitation reports are greatly appreciated and go directly to your local National Weather Service forecast office. But you still have to come back the next morning and enter your total daily precipitation amount.

5) The "wrong place" error occurs when your data are plotted in the wrong place on our maps. This means we don't have your correct latitude and longitude. The geo-coding software that we use USUALLY works very well, but not always. Sometimes we may have you in the wrong place -- or even the wrong county. We even found a few of you in China and one in Greenland. Please check to

make sure your data are appearing in the right location. If not, please let us know so the latitude and longitude can be corrected.

Congratulations if you have made it through this whole message. This is probably more than you felt like reading -- but it is important. The best line of defense against data errors are well trained observers. If you need more training (and many of us do when it comes to snow), then check to see if training sessions will be offered in your area. Contact your county coordinator if you have questions. By all means, take a look at the training instructions on the CoCoRaHS website. Finally, check your own data and see how it compares to others in your area. If you make an error (and you will someday), you can always go back and correct it yourself.

Make room for more

We are now only a few days away from having Florida and Alabama on the CoCoRaHS band wagon. It is going to be really amazing to be able to see the rainfall patterns in these southeastern states. Floridians have been so eager to join, that we have had nearly a dozen new applications this week that signed up in Alaska -- with their Florida addresses. Isn't that curious. Next to join, before the snow flies, will be Kentucky.

A word of thanks

I cannot thank you enough for helping out. Checking a rain gauge day in and day out gets a bit tedious. I understand if some of you get tired of it. If you've had enough, perhaps you can find a friend or neighbor to put the gauge to good use and continue the tradition. But for all of you who persist, please know your efforts are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Nolan from Colorado