

The Catch

COCORAHS—HAPPY NEW YEAR!! WELCOME WATER YEAR 2008

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, October 2, 2007

CoCoRaHS -- Happy New Year!! Welcome Water Year 2008

Those of you who have been with CoCoRaHS a year or more know what we're talking about. The rest of you probably think we're crazy.

This (October 1) really is the first day of 2008 -- at least the 2008 water Year. Hydrologists and many other water resource specialists keep track of precipitation, stream flow and ground water using the Water Year calendar. The year starts on October 1 as the growing season ends, leaves tumble, crops are harvested, and outdoor water use (irrigation) declines. Here in the Rocky Mountain region, we've had our first dusting of snow in the high mountains, and soon the 2008 winter snow accumulation season will begin. From now until next spring, precipitation exceeds evaporation over much of the country. At last, soil moisture recharge can begin. With that comes an increase in river flow in many watersheds across the country from their current low levels. There are a lot of folks over the dry West and the drought stricken Southeast that are anxiously looking forward to less evaporation and more precipitation to alleviate drought stress. Hopefully that will be the case soon.

Our Water Year ritual

Many of you know the CoCoRaHS routine. As soon as Sept 30th has come and gone, the 2007 Water Year (WY) is over. This means it's time to compile our year-end reports. I have already had many e-mails from eager CoCoRaisins who have sent me their 2007 WY reports. Thanks!! Of the reports I've received so far, totals for the past year range from less than 13" (some places in Colorado) to over 50" (locations in northern Indiana and parts of Missouri). I'm sure some of you got even more -- and others got even less and that is one of the many reasons for CoCoRaHS.

I have not made a big deal this year about our year-end reports for at least 2 reasons. 1) We have made progress since last year and we can now run computer summaries of all the data we've received 2) We are a little worried, now that we have added nearly 2000 new observers since last year, that if you all

got on the computer at the same time to check and process your data, it might crash our server.

We can use our computer to summarize all the data you collected this past year. But you know your data better than anyone else. This is a great time to go back and check over the past 12 months. Find and correct any errors that you discover, and fill in any missing reports you forgot to submit.

Then sum up FOR EACH MONTH October 2006 - Sept 2007

- 1) Total precipitation (rain and water content of snow/ice that fell)
- 2) Total number of days each month with measurable precipitation (0.01" or more)
- 3) Total snowfall (inches of new snow)
- 4) Total number of days each month with measurable snowfall (0.1" or more)
- 5) Total number of days, each month, with hail (any size, any amount)
- 6) Anything else that you found interesting or significant (blizzards, freezing rain, tornadoes, etc.

If you do check over your data, I suggest you do this at off-peak hours so you don't crash our computer. After 3 PM and before 5 AM are the best times of day. Then, we'll compile all the information and later this month we will share results. I am anxious to see how many of us have complete totals for this past year.

Here on the northwest edge of Fort Collins, CO, the 2007 water year precipitation (rain and the water content of snow) total was 14.39". A total of 53.6" of snow fell. We had 92 days with measurable precipitation (rain and/or snow) and 26 days with at least 0.1" of snowfall. All we had were a few small hail stones once during the year. These numbers are close to our long-term averages, but a little dry on the rainfall side and light on the hail side. Send more rain.

Florida -- CoCoRaHS welcomes you

Florida officially joined CoCoRaHS today -- and with a bang! New applications have been coming in constantly. Already there are over 60 new rainfall reports on today's Florida map with reports coming from as far south as the Florida Keys and Miami-Dade County up to Tampa - St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, and out west on the Panhandle. Florida is destined to be one of our more interesting states. There may not be much elevation change or snow, but there is a lot of subtropical humidity, sea/land breeze interactions, and occasional tropical storms. So let's Welcome Florida!

Next up will be Alabama and Kentucky. We also got a message this past week that Rutgers University in New Jersey would like to help sponsor CoCoRaHS. We are also holding a phone meeting with Oregon this week. So start alerting your weather friends in those states.

Fall transition -- rainfall patterns will change

It won't be long until the thunderstorms of summer give way to longer-lasting, more gentle (less intense) and more widespread rains of autumn. Some of our southeastern states would pay good money for "widespread rain" about now. While changes are coming, thunderstorms are still cracking in a few areas, and highly varied precipitation amounts are still common. Our wettest reporting station today (24-hour total ending at 7 AM Oct 1) was in NW Iowa where a thunderstorm dropped over 3" of rain yesterday. Here is what one observer reported!

IA-PL-1 Brunsville 0.3 SSW

"Tornado warnings given, sirens sounded. 1" hail along with 60 mph winds. All rain not accounted for due to horizontal rain. Flooding across county roads from fields. House, tree, vehicle damage. 1-2 ft diameter tree branches down, most leaves shredded. More damage reports later when daylight arrives."

Your Comments Appreciated

Each of our data entry forms contain a block called "Observation notes" where you can type in any interesting narrative or numeric describing your local weather conditions. Your comments, as the example above shows, add substantially to the value and understanding of your observations. Your descriptive notes become an archived journal of your local weather conditions through the year. Go ahead and wax poetic if you wish.

To see the comments from other observers, go to:
<http://www.cocorahs.org/ViewData/ListDailyComments.aspx>

Tracking Drought

I know from some of your reports and comments, that drought still has a strong grip on parts of the country. For some places in Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee, this has been the driest spring and summer on record -- looking back more than 100 years. To track the expansion and retreat of drought in North America, go to: <http://www.drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html>

Your CoCoRaHS rainfall reports can help these large-scale drought assessments, so keep that in mind when you're sick and tired of reporting another day with no precipitation. :-)

Chris's CoCoRaHS Blog <http://cocorahs.blogspot.com/>

Chris Spears is blogging away about CoCoRaHS -- and doing a great job. If you have the time, keep up with CoCoRaHS weather across the country.

T-shirts going fast

We are thrilled to report that we've already distribute over 100 of our new shirts and orders are still coming in. We're almost out of certain sizes and colors, but we talked to the printer today and we're planning to print some more. Thanks very much for your support of this endeavor.

Fort Collins Picnic

We will be celebrating our 10th summer of CoCoRaHS in northern Colorado with a picnic this Saturday in Fort Collins. A few of the originals from when we started in 1998 are still participating and will attend the picnic. In past years our picnic weather has been absolutely spectacular. Last year's picnic will be especially tough to match. A giant whirlwind/dust devil (but there was no dust) went right through our picnic while we were playing games. Napkins and potato chips soared hundreds of feet into the air. We hooted and hollered, cheered and yelled as it moved through. The vortex moved slowly enough that many of us chased after it with our cameras (it's hard to get a good photo from close range). Eventually it dissipated, and all the napkins and leaves drifted back to the ground. We all felt that we had somehow been gifted with a special treat and memory. What weather will we experience this time? We'll find out soon.

Special Request -- Volunteer illustrator needed

CoCoRaHS is currently working on a series of classes and short science lessons that can be used in 4-H clubs and activities across the country. The lessons are good, but they don't look very fun or interesting.

To help bring these lessons alive, we need help with a few illustrations. If you happen to be an illustrator who can afford to donate a few hours of time to help CoCoRaHS, please let me know.

Love plants, love seasons, love helping?

If this describes you, consider an invitation from the National Phenology Network to help observe vegetation and its response to our climate. To learn more about this network and Project Budburst, go to:

<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/Geography/npn/index.html>
http://www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst/

Strong winds -- better sign off

It was calm all evening, but now the winds are howling outside and gusting over 40 mph. I'll say goodnight and send this off before the power goes off.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University