

The Catch

COCORAHS—IF SNOW WAS FALLING BUT NEVER WHITENED THE GROUND?

FORT COLLINS, CO — Monday, November 5, 2007

Good evening

It's chilly in Colorado tonight. After seeing temperatures in the mid 70s on Sunday, we're down in the 20s tonight. The barn cats are pressing up the mudroom door hoping for a chance to sneak in for some warmth. Before I drain the pump for the winter, I wanted to water one more patch of grass. That should be an icy delight by morning.

You may have noticed, but this past weekend was quite remarkable. It was remarkable for the ABSENCE of storms. There was scarcely any rain anywhere in the lower 48. For those of you who are football followers, I don't think there was any game anywhere in the country, college or pro, that was affected by wet weather. So for all of you who's favorite team(s) ended up with fewer points than the opponent (like all of my teams), the classic "bad weather" excuse will not hold much water this week.

Stormy tonight

Today the weather got livelier as a strong cold front encountered enough moisture to kick off a line of storms from New England down into Tennessee. Also, the first major Great Lakes snow squalls of the season are rolling tonight and headed towards the snow belts of New York for tomorrow.

A question about snow.

Speaking of snow, I got the following question today:

"Hi, I am an observer from Brookfield, WI, and we have had our first snow today, Nov. 5th 2007. My question is how do we report a snow/sleet squall event if the snow is barely a trace, stays on the ground for a minute, and then is gone. Should I record the amount of water from the melted snow, and then just say that

we had snow in the observation part of the precipitation form? If you could get back to this message soon, that would be great. Thanks"

Answer:

First of all, report the melted water from the snow in your gauge just the same as you would a rain event. As for the snow, if snow fell but NEVER whitened the grass, then report T for the snowfall (not 0.0). If the snow did whiten the ground, even if just for a few minutes, then report the maximum depth of accumulation prior to melting. For example, it usually takes just about 0.1" of new snow to turn the grass white. If there were several squalls, each of which whitened the grass but all melted between squalls, then sum up the total from each squall to get your daily New Snow amount. As for total snow depth, if the snow is all gone by 7 AM, then report 0.0 for the total depth. If there is just a dusting left in a few spots, report T.

More on drought!

With the southern California fires and the steady barrage of news stories from the Southeast, drought remains a major topic of conversation. Autumn is not normally a high-impact time of year for drought, but this year it is a big deal. A week ago, things were looking up as a storm dumped widespread and locally heavy precipitation over the Southeast. But then the clouds disappeared again.

As of last Thursday, there is a new drought information website where we can all track the pulse of drought across the country. This new website was launched as a part of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS). The website is designed as a one-stop go-to website for most anything you may need to know about drought. In particular, it will focus on the current status of drought across the country, drought impacts, and drought forecasts. I highly recommend you check it out and, if you are drought inclined, add it to your "favorite" bookmarks: <http://www.drought.gov>

CoCoRaHS is helping

You may not realize it, but your observations are already contributing to U.S. drought information. I may seem like a nag at times, always encouraging people to report their zeros (0.00) when no precipitation falls. But lack of precipitation IS important. Each dry day could be the start of the next drought or carry us deeper into an existing moisture shortage.

The National Integrated Drought Information System will be undertaking more activities in the months and years to come. We will have more opportunities to contribute to this effort. In addition to our precipitation measurements, we will also be encouraged to submit drought impacts reports from our farms, our

communities and our watersheds. CoCoRaHS is also a logical collaboration for drought education as we are all able, to some extent, to share useful information with neighbors, friends and families.

Currently, drought conditions are assessed on a county by county basis. In reality, drought conditions can vary greatly within each county. That is where CoCoRaHS can really help -- along with information from satellites and other sources. Hopefully the day will come when we have several volunteers in most counties of the country. So keep spreading the word.

Other stuff

Don't expect to hear from me for awhile. Many other projects await. But keep your data entries coming. Don't forget to review the instructions for measuring snow.

If you are in the Denver area on Nov. 13th, please come to the WILD WESTERN WEATHER seminar that will be held at the Wildlife Experience in Parker, located at 10035 South Peoria at the intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Peoria Street. The seminar will run from 6:00 PM until 10:00 PM and is organized by KMGH TV Ch 7. I will be one of several speakers. It should be great fun for weather enthusiasts. You may need to RSVP so please check the KMGH website.

Have a great November.

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