

The Catch

COCORAHS—NEVADA TAKES A TURN AT THE TOP

FORT COLLINS, CO — Saturday, January 5, 2008

Hello fellow weather enthusiasts.

Once again the winds here in northern Colorado are howling this evening as the storm system that crashed into California on Thursday and Friday is now passing overhead. Not much moisture for us here in the lee (i.e. on the dry, downwind side) of the Rocky Mountains, but it's snowing heavily in our high country, and we managed a few sprinkles of rain here this afternoon. Today is our 30th consecutive day with the ground covered by snow, but after two days of strong downslope "Chinook" winds, the snow is half gone and not looking so good. We're not the only ones that have had winds. Nearly every western state has been buffeted as this storm system moved inland. Meanwhile, folks in the eastern half of the country are enjoying a fairly mild winter interlude after some cold weather earlier in the week. Even folks in Florida got their chance to shiver.

Nevada goes crazy

What caught my eye on the CoCoRaHS precipitation reports today were all the reports of heavy precipitation from the unlikely state of Nevada. Two measurements exceeding 4.00" of water content in the past 24 hours -- first heavy rain and then a bunch of wet snow. We may have gotten more reports, but we understand the power was knocked out in several areas. This time next year when California will be a part of the CoCoRaHS network, I'm sure CA would have been "the winner" today, but a couple of stations on the back side of the Sierra Nevada were the "wettest in CoCoRaHS" for January 5. I think this is only the second time that Nevada has claimed this distinction since they joined last spring.

Thanks, by the way, to all of you there in the Reno area who have signed on to help CoCoRaHS. More often than not, all they get to report is ZERO, but every now and then . . . Even Las Vegas got close to half an inch of precipitation from this storm.

Watch Oregon

Oregon has only been a part of CoCoRaHS now for 5 weeks but already we are seeing close to 250 rainfall reports per day. Like so many of the Western states, the population of the state is concentrated in a few areas. Where the most people live is where we see the most CoCoRaHS volunteers (not a surprise). If you ever wanted to see a state that can teach us all lessons about orographic (mountain-related) influences on precipitation, Oregon is the place. First the Coastal Range wrings out Pacific moisture and protects the corridor of inland cities from the heaviest rains. Then the Cascade Mountains squeezes out much more moisture in the form of low-elevation rains and high mountain snows from the prevailing storm track coming inland off the Ocean. Then, over a distance of just a few miles, the precipitation decrease dramatically from the crest of the Cascades leaving much of central and eastern Oregon bone dry. Not many folks live in the driest parts of the state, so we don't have many data points to show there. But if you have the time and the interest, do keep an eye on the Oregon maps as each new winter storm system comes ashore.

Oregon State University has been involved for nearly two decades now in developing computerized capabilities for mapping precipitation and other climate variables. If you would like to admire some of their scientific handiwork, go to this website:

<http://www.prism.oregonstate.edu/>

Keep in mind, as good as their maps may appear, they are only as good as the data that go into them. We must maintain quality climate observations across the country in order to produce accurate and useful climate maps. The measurements of precipitation that we are making today will help make even better rain and snow maps for the country in the future.

Louisiana -- Welcome Aboard

Louisiana is now officially a part of the CoCoRaHS network! There aren't many volunteers signed up yet, but I bet before too long Louisiana will be claiming "wettest in the nation" their fair share of the time. The main CoCoRaHS Kickoff will be on January 20th. The American Meteorological Society is holding it's 88th Annual Meeting in New Orleans later this month. (<http://www.ametsoc.org/>) On Sunday, January 20th, there will be a special free public event at the New Orleans Convention Center called "WeatherFest". CoCoRaHS will be one of many exhibits there. Along with many high tech displays, we'll be showing off our lowly rain gauges and foam/foil hail pads. But with any luck we'll start CoCoRaHS off with a bang and recruit many new families.

If you are planning on being in or near New Orleans on January 20th, please drop by our exhibit. We'd love to see you.

Six more weeks!

For those of you who hate cold weather, I'm sorry to say that there will be more cold ahead. From now to mid February we often see some of the coldest days and nights of the year. But after that, the higher sun angles and longer days begin to win the battle -- and warmer weather is near.

And with the warmer weather comes

Believe it or not, the next severe weather season is not far away -- thunder, hail, you name it. It will start in the South and then spread up into the Midwest and eventually arrive later in the spring in the northern states (at least that's what typically happens). So as you face a bit more winter, please know that the next weather battle is just around the corner. Once again, the measurements that we take and the data we transmit will help scientists learn more about our weather and climate and will help forecasters alert the public to impending threats.

Update on Fund Raising

I will have more detailed information in the near future, but I am pleased to report that we have received some generous donations that will help our efforts in 2008. As we learn more about fund raising, we will be passing more information on about our plans and our needs. Thanks again for helping, and please contact me if you have questions or suggestions.

Stay warm, stay dry.

The "yellow Lab" is still with us -- covered in mud and water today as our snow has been melting. Somehow you notice more about the outdoors when you share it with animals -- for better or for worse.

Best wishes!

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University
nolan@atmos.colostate.edu