

# The Catch

## **COCORAHS—FEBRUARY ARRIVES!**

FORT COLLINS, CO — Monday, February 4, 2008

### **Good evening—weather team!**

Today it snowed—3" of lovely dendritic conglomerates (more commonly called great big snowflakes). It was enough to decorate, dampen and cover all the ground, but the roads melted enough so travel was not a bad problem. Our December snows had finally just about disappeared. After 50 straight days with snow cover, bare ground had returned. I even got a few whiffs of spring-like air -- and the corral melted enough that I could clean up some half-thawed horse manure (lucky me). We won't have to buy eggs again for a long time, as the chickens have remembered why we feed and care for them. They had great fun on Saturday pecking in the compost pile and picking up all the millet seed on the ground under the bird feeder. (Question: Do any birdfeeder birds actually like millet??)

### **Deep Snow!**

Parts of Colorado have been getting pounded by one storm after another. For the first time in 10 years, mountain snowpack is greater than average in every river basin of our state. That means "water" and that's good news. But in the meantime, some folks are tiring of snow. I looked at the CoCoRaHS "Daily Precipitation Reports" today and dozens are reporting total snow depths exceeding 24". Two stations in Colorado are now up over 80" of total depth of snow on ground. Even the "banana belt" cities of western Colorado -- Montrose and Grand Junction—have been snow covered now for months. Glenwood Springs, known for it's huge hot springs pool, now looks like an alpine winter wonderland as well. There is something magical about deep snow and a steaming hot springs. Recent pictures from Steamboat Springs showed snow banks high enough to sled down. Durango, in southwest Colorado, has 3-4 feet of snow on the level, and folks have began asking me when to worry about too much snow. Climatologically, this is the time of year when deep snows are most common—before the warmer temperatures and higher sun angles of spring begin to do their work.

## **How much does snow weigh?**

It is a good idea to keep track of how much weight is on your roof. Indeed, our county building departments do track these things and try to make sure that buildings are properly designed and built to withstand deep snow. Typically, a foot of new snow will melt down to about 1" of water. That is equivalent to about 5 pounds per square foot. If your roof covers 1,500 square feet, that would total 7,500 pounds. But what if it keeps snowing and the snow doesn't melt? After a few weeks, you may have received 100 inches. At a similar density, that would be about 40 pounds per square foot of flat area. 40 pounds times 1,500 square feet of roof is a quick 60,000 pounds -- enough to give you something to think about while trying to get a good night's sleep. Add some rain to that (snow soaks up rain like a sponge) and you can get into trouble. So check with your county building department and find out what the "design snow load" is for your area. When the weight of snow surpasses about 50% of the design load, it may be a good idea to remove some snow from the roof—carefully, of course.

## **Ground Hog Day—Welcome New Jersey**

Ground Hog Day, Feb 2, is an important holiday for meteorologists, and a cause (or at least a good excuse) for celebration. It means that winter is ending -- but not quite (Why does that blasted Ground Hog ALWAYS see his/her shadow, regardless of the weather? I know for a fact the Pennsylvania has a lot of cloudy weather in early Feb.) This year we celebrated by launching a new CoCoRaHS state -- New Jersey. So call up your cousins and let them know they are needed. Now we get to learn even more geography -- and a few more county names such as Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Somerset. New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the U.S., offers us our best chance of reaching our CoCoRaHS station density goal of at least one volunteer per square mile over urban and suburban areas and one per 36 square miles in rural regions. They have enough weather enthusiastic residents that this is possible. Go New Jersey!!

## **Severe Weather Spotter Training**

This is just a reminder that this is the time of year when many National Weather Service offices across the country conduct free public training classes on how to spot and report critical severe weather. If this is something you might want to do or learn more about, then please contact your local National Weather Service office -- [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov) -- and check for links to upcoming training classes.

**5,000**

We are now reliably getting over 4,000 CoCoRaHS daily precipitation reports each day. As more of us come out of hibernation, these numbers will rise and hopefully we will reach the 5,000 mark by March. Then, come March, it will be time for our annual "March Madness" competition where all states compete for the most number of new CoCoRaHS recruits. It's not exactly the Super Bowl, but for us weather folks it's a lot of fun.

Thanks for helping CoCoRaHS, and please know that your weather reports are appreciated. Many organizations; private, public, research, education, and business; are making use of CoCoRaHS as a great source for local precipitation information. You help make that possible.

### **Rain in Alabama**

As you probably know, Alabama has suffered through severe drought much of 2007. Rains have been picking up lately, and on Friday morning over 300 CoCoRaisins reported rain in Alabama. With a statewide average of 1.30" of rain for that day, this was the wettest day in Alabama since CoCoRaHS began last fall. Let's wish Alabama a green spring and an end to drought.

### **Hail study in Texas**

This is just an early heads up that there may be a special CoCoRaHS hail project in the Dallas-Fort Worth area this spring. Details are coming together, but we may be looking for hundreds of volunteers in that hail-prone region to help deploy hail pads. Stay tuned.

Have a great February, don't catch the flu, and we'll talk to you again soon.

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