

The Catch

COCORAHS—MARCHING INTO SPRING

FORT COLLINS, CO — Saturday, March 8, 2008

Good evening -- CoCoRaHS weather watchers:

It was a warm evening here in northern Colorado. For the 136th straight day I wore my insulated coveralls to do the chores, but tonight I was too warm. The snow and ice are now almost entirely melted from the horse corral -- and for the time being there is no more mud! After a few "off days" every one of our hens laid an egg today. Life is good.

Not so good in the Ohio Valley

It's quite a different story in Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio (I wish CoCoRaHS was in Ohio) tonight. A March snowstorm is rolling through that area tonight. I think I even heard about a blizzard warning for SW Ohio. That's wild. I better e-mail my cousins there to get an eyewitness report.

Welcome South Carolina!!

We have added yet another state to CoCoRaHS since I last sent out a note in February. South Carolina is now the 29th state to join our volunteer network. New applications are pouring in, and as of this evening 132 residents of South Carolina have already signed up. 54 folks have sent in at least one report, so we are off and running. South Carolina has taken an early lead in our CoCoRaHS annual "March Madness" competition. Not to be out done by basketball fever, each year we see which state can sign up the most new volunteers during March. You can play too. Get out there and start recruiting!!! Each week we will be compiling and displaying the number of new recruits and at the end of the month we will announce the winning state. Give it your best!

Snow in Texas!

Thursday afternoon it snowed around Dallas and over other parts of NE Texas. In fact there were as many reports of snow in Texas on this morning's CoCoRaHS daily precipitation reports than there was in Colorado. The greatest snowfall reported by any of the nearly 4,000 volunteers all across the nation who reported today was from Cooke County, Texas with a whopping 9.0" of snow. That won't happen very often. Meanwhile, the heaviest rains reported today were all in Palm Beach County, Florida, just north of Miami where several CoCoRaHS observers received over 3.50" of rain. Parts of Florida remain very dry, but today most stations reported at least some rain.

Speaking of Texas, Henry and I will be in the Dallas - Fort Worth area this coming Tuesday to give a series of presentations on CoCoRaHS. Texas is on its way to having the largest number of active volunteers of any state. Also, there is a major hail study being planned for the Dallas -- Fort Worth area this spring and summer by an organization of experts and consultants on roof materials and design. This area is considered to be the largest metropolitan area in North America having the greatest probability of receiving hail stones of 1.5" diameter or greater. Yikes! So we are going to pitch in and try to help. If you happen to be in northern Texas and have a free hour on Tuesday evening (March 11th) we would love to meet and talk about rain, hail -- and even snow.

<http://www.ametsoc.org/chapters/northtexas/>

It always rains somewhere?

Ever since CoCoRaHS expanded eastward from the Rockies to the East Coast over two years ago, there has not been a single day when all of our gauges were dry at the same time. There have been plenty of storms sweeping across the country this winter. Earlier this week we had two days in a row where nearly 50% of us had measurable precipitation in our gauges (March 4 and 5th). The average CoCoRaHS precipitation nationwide was 0.40" on March 4th. This tied with Feb 6th as the wettest day of the winter. If you are interested in strange statistics like this, then click on the "Rainy Days" report on the CoCoRaHS website. Choose your favorite state or just click "Select State" at the top of the list to view statistics for all of our stations.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/ViewData/RainyDaysReport.aspx>

Our driest day in recent weeks was February 28 when only 388 out of 4,062 observers had measurable precipitation.

Spelling, grammar, and other climatologist deficiencies.

Every time I write a note to our corps of CoCoRaHS volunteers, I hear back from a few of you carefully and politely pointing out my misspellings, poor grammar, wrong punctuation, and my gross misuse of apostrophes. Please accept my apologies. Your comments, of course, are correct and appreciated. My mother was my 7th and 8th grade English teacher and she is probably turning over in her grave every time I goof up. Since she's not around to correct me, she appreciates those of you who do.

Who's rain gauge is right -- you or the Airport?

For over 50 years, the official National Weather Service weather station for most of our nation's larger cities have been located at the airport. As such, I find it very interesting now when I get questions about why CoCoRaHS readings differ from the nearest airport. Have you noticed? With so many CoCoRaHS volunteers in some parts of the country, it is easy to see why. Precipitation varies from place to place -- and sometimes it varies a lot. A recent storm on the Gulf Coast of Florida dropped over 10" of rain on one of our few observers in that area. Not far away, the airport weather station only reported around 3". Who was right? Well, it is possible that both were right and that there happened to be a lot more rain in one location than at the airport. But also keep in mind that almost all airport weather stations in our country now use automated rain gauges. Instead of weather stations with professional meteorologists and multiple rain gauges (which was common practice for many decades at major airports), now most airports have only one gauge and it is electronic and unattended. As those of you with home electronic weather stations have seen, it is quite common for electronic gauges to report less precipitation than manually-read gauges, especially during very heavy storms. So the chances are, your measurement may actually be better than the airport. Do your best and make sure your gauge is in a great location where trees aren't blocking the rain, and where extra rain is not splashing in from your roof or a railing.

Hurray for Zero

I know it's boring to find nothing in your gauge. When it's dry it is hard to be motivated to make the effort to get on the computer and type in 0.00" But as we have said many times before, we are interested in both wet and dry weather. Your efforts to report ZERO precipitation are greatly appreciated.

Differences of opinion

When I last wrote in February, I questioned if winter would ever end. It was neat to hear back from some of you from northern and mountain areas of the country saying "What do you mean, ending? It's just getting started." By the way, as of

this morning, close to 400 (about 10%) of us were still reporting snow on the ground. The Gothic station north of Crested Butte in the Colorado Rockies is still leading the way with 77" of snow remaining on the ground (about 10" less than last week). Winter ain't over yet.

Also, when I mentioned some of the nation's wet spots, I heard back from some of you in central Texas. While last spring and summer you were incredibly wet, this same area (San Antonio and vicinity) has now gone months with little rain. Fortunately, upwards of 1" of rain fell in some areas near San Antonia yesterday -- the first good rain since early September.

Could your rain gauge overflow?

The CoCoRaHS rain gauge inner tube holds exactly 1.00" of rain. If more falls, it spills out and collects in the large outer cylinder. In all, the gauge holds a combined 11.30" or very close. For most areas of the country, the chances are that you will not see that much rain in 24 hours in your lifetime. But it is possible, especially along the Gulf Coast and in some areas of the Southeast and the eastern slopes of the Appalachian Mountains. Even in the interior of the U.S., isolated rainfall of 11" or more is possible from localized extreme thunderstorms. Back in Colorado in 1935 there are convincing stories of over 24" of rain in 24 hours here in our normally dry eastern plains.

Why am I telling you this? With thousands of us out measuring this year, the chances are that a few of us will experience extreme rains -- heavy enough to fill your gauge to the top. Already in 2007 we had 5 cases of gauges filled to the top.

If, by chance, you experience such a storm, PLEASE submit "Intense Rain Reports" to CoCoRaHS or to your local National Weather Service office. Storms of this magnitude cause extreme flooding and could claim casualties. Also, if it has rained a lot and you are concerned that your gauge might spill over the top, then please go out during a break in the storm and take a preliminary reading. Then empty the gauge so there is room for more should the storm continue. If you do experience very heavy rains, always add remarks that confirm the large amounts. This remark accompanied the recent rainfall report of 10.12" in the Panhandle of Florida on February 22nd.

"Very heavy almost continuous rain...lots of street flooding...not seen by me in the last 12 years of living here."

Remarks like this help explain what is going on and provide credence and verification for unusual reports.

Call for volunteers -- National Phenology Network

Some of you weather watchers also like to watch plants, animals, birds and other parts of nature. There are seasonal patterns to budding, blossoming, hatching, and migrating that are at least partially affected by climate. Starting last year, there is a nationwide opportunity to help gather information for the new National Phenology Network. To learn more:

<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/Geography/npn/>

If this sounds exciting, please sign up.

1) If you have access to the Internet, use the web page <http://www.npn.uwm.edu> to register. Be sure to include your name, full email address, mailing address, and CoCoRaHS station number. Place your CoCoRaHS number in the "comments" box. Your phone number, other information, or questions can also be listed in the "comments" box.

2) If you do NOT have access to the Internet, call (414) 229-2436 and provide the same information listed in "1" above.

3) If the first two options do not work for you, you can send the information listed in "1" above to:

Prof. Mark D. Schwartz
Department of Geography
UW-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413

And in Conclusion

Are you still with me? Thanks so much for your interest and your help measuring rain, hail and snow. If you haven't gotten around to acquiring and installing your new gauge or if you just haven't started reporting to CoCoRaHS yet, this would be a great time to get started. If you have questions, let us know. Ideally, contact your local CoCoRaHS coordinator so I don't drown in e-mail.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=coord>

Have a great weekend.

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University