

The Catch

COCORAHS—PASSING THROUGH MID SUMMER!

FORT COLLINS, CO — Monday, July 21, 2008

Greetings from toasty dry northern Colorado

A quick welcome to all of you who are new to CoCoRaHS in the past few weeks. We had one day last week where over 50 new people signed up to join our rainfall reporting network. THANKS!

We hit 97 F yesterday -- a scorcher for our part of Colorado. Each time the horses walk around in the corral, a cloud of dust is kicked up. There have been some showers around -- convection (cumulus buildups) triggered by daytime heating from the sun. We've had at least a dozen days with a trace (T) of precipitation, but the bigger storms keep missing. Since our last good rain June 4-5, we've totaled just 0.47" here at the house. That's only enough to keep up with evaporation rates for about 2 days. So things are dry. Fortunately, our irrigation water (from mountain snow melt) has held out, so our little pasture still looks OK.

In our part of the country, we often have a rainy season in late July and early August when the North American Monsoon circulation (which helps bring moisture into the southwestern U.S. from across Mexico during summer and early fall) reaches its most northerly extent. That's also a time when our part of the country is most prone to extreme but local flash flooding if the right set of conditions come together. Recall the Fort Collins flood of July 28, 1997, the Big Thompson Flash Flood of July 31, 1976 and the Cheyenne, WY flash flood of Aug. 1, 1985 as well as numerous other less well known storms. So I'm hoping we get some rain in the next 3-4 weeks and no more of this 9% afternoon relative humidity stuff we've been having. That dry air and intense sun is hard on skin, and makes us look older before our time. (We're a bit jealous of you young-skinned folks from cloudier humid parts of the country -- but only a little :-))

"The Catch"

Some have asked about getting on the e-mail list for "The Catch" – what we call our bi-monthly newsletter. Well, it turns out we're pretty informal, and these periodic e-mails I send out ARE the "newsletter".

Henry (our CoCoRaHS National Coordinator and a huge help to me keeping CoCoRaHS going) formats my e-mails and creates an archive on our website so you can go back to read past messages any time you wish just by clicking on:

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

I hope this clears up the confusion.

Glad to have Utah

Utah, our neighbor to the west, was our most recent state to join CoCoRaHS. Nearly 100 Utahans (how do you spell and say that?) have volunteered, and about 30 have their gauges set up and are reporting. Please spread the word. There hasn't been much rain to report there yet, but that could change any day.

Mississippi -- next up

Mississippi officially comes on board August 1, and people are already signing up. With the addition of Mississippi, the entire SE part of our country and the hurricane coasts will be covered.

Getting started

We notice hundreds of us sign up but never quite get around to getting set up to report precipitation. It's really not hard and we have volunteers all across the country ready to help you. So if you are one of the ???? CoCoRaHS volunteers who has never quite gotten started, please do so today. Your rainfall reports will help us more accurately track the precipitation in your state.

Report your Zeros and Traces

Just a reminder that your reports of Zero and Trace precipitation are more important than you may realize. In order to accurately map and compile precipitation patterns across your county, state and our nation, we need to know both where it did and didn't rain. So please take the extra minute to report if you can. Also, remember our "Monthly Zeros" report form which makes it easy to go back at the end of the month and fill in the dry days that you skipped over.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/MonthlyZerosReport.aspx>

If you have questions, let us know.

Florida rains adding up

I ran the "Total Precipitation Report" for Florida to see what the summer has been like. We have over 400 volunteers reporting now in Florida, and rains since June 1 have been amazing. Totals have varied from over 25 inches in places like Fort Myers to only about 2" on one of the Keys and 3" up near the Alabama border. Nearly 100 observers have received over 14" of rain since June 1 -- and that has taken a nice bite out of their drought conditions.

There has also been some rain in the parched regions of west Texas. Our most drought-stricken county in Colorado -- Baca County adjacent to the Oklahoma panhandle in SE Colorado even got some good rains on Friday. But other areas are still dry.

Speaking of Dry

Drought is a big deal in the U.S. and all around the world. While floods, fires, blizzards, tornadoes and hurricanes get the media attention, drought causes hardships that are more far reaching.

There is a special website that has recently been updated to help track and predict drought as well as help us plan for it. The Drought Monitor -- a national map of drought conditions updated weekly -- has become one of the most popular climate-related websites in the country.

<http://www.drought.gov>

If you are experiencing impacts from drought, feel free to mention them in your CoCoRaHS daily precipitation report "comments". If you use the word "drought" it will help the search engine find your remarks.

Tracking vegetation -- the National Phenology Network

I recently received my new "Cloned Common Lilacs" from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee to plant in our yard. As they grow and flower in years ahead, I will report the dates of budding, blooming and other development stages so we can track these patterns and annual variations across the country. This spring, I kept waiting for our existing lilacs to bloom -- a nice part of springtime in Colorado most years. But this year they never bloomed -- bummer. Meanwhile, the lilacs up in our higher elevation mountain communities had a great year -- blooming nearly to the end of June.

The National Phenology Network is a relatively new organization dedicated to understanding and tracking the relationship between climate and plant behavior and development (possibly adding birds, animals, etc. and other parts of nature affected by climate variations). They recently updated their website.

<http://www.usanpn.org/>

There are opportunities all across the country for folks like you who are interested in both the changing weather and its influence on plants, insects, animals etc. to pitch in and help by taking backyard measurements. Use the following website to join this effort. <http://www.npn.uwm.edu>

A new sponsor for CoCoRaHS -- PRISM

We are pleased to announce a new collaboration. PRISM is a climate information mapping research group at Oregon State University. For nearly 20 years this group has been learning how to more accurately map elements of our climate -- such as precipitation and temperature -- in challenging environments such as mountains, coastal areas and everything in between. If you have a moment to check out some of their scientific handiwork, including maps of monthly precipitation for recent months or maps of climate averages, check out their website at <http://www.prism.oregonstate.edu/>

Dr. Christopher Daly, the director of the PRISM group, has extend an unusual "special offer" to our group. The more data that are available, the better they can make maps. They have created a new "Tool" where you type in your location (latitude and longitude). The PRISM model then provides a best estimate of the average monthly temperatures and precipitation for your area. It even provides an estimate of the history of precipitation for your area (based on surrounding official weather stations operated for the past century). Please keep in mind that the results are not actual data for your community but estimates made by a computer model.

Try it out and let me know what you think. Here are the instructions.

Goto <http://prism.oregonstate.edu/> and click the "Data Explorer" link in the What's New section or the "Internet Map Server" link under quicklinks.

You will be presented with a map which you can use to zoom-In / navigate to the area of interest. Note that clicking on the map will update the Lat/Lon coordinates in the table. Alternately you can manually enter the coordinates.

Clicking on the TimeSeries button will return a table of values for the given cell and years.

Clicking on the Normals button will return a table of TMAX, TMIN, and Precip values for the selected grid cell.

Was it Angel??

Two weeks ago a fox snuck off with one of our chickens. We keep the chickens well protected in our "chicken yard" MOST of the time, but we decided it would be OK to let them out in the pasture for a few minutes to catch some of the young batch of grasshoppers. They had a great time -- for a few minutes. But when we came back a few minutes later there was fluster of feathers and a proud fox darted off with dinner.

Then last week, two of our nearly full-grown young geese disappeared. We searched the whole place and only found a few feathers. Our first reaction was to blame the new dog (Angel, the Great Pyrenees). But she probably would have left a mess if it was her doing. Was it a fox or a fox family? Maybe -- but if you know geese, healthy adults can be darn obnoxious and can often drive off smaller predators. But these were young and inexperienced geese -- so maybe they made a dandy meal for the neighborhood fox family. Ah yes, the joys of "farm" life. (I put "farm" in parenthesis since many of you are true farmers. We would fit better in the "hobby farm" category. With 5 acres and not much water, we aren't doing much to feed the world, but we learn something new every day.) We'll be having a good crop of tomatoes and beans soon - if the hail holds off :-)

Have a great week.

My efforts to be brief have failed again. Maybe next time. Thanks to all of you who have become a part of CoCoRaHS and contribute to our ever-expanding understanding for the variations in precipitation across our land. Your efforts are appreciated -- and if you can recruit a few more volunteers to fill more gaps, you will be even more appreciated.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University