

The Catch

COCORAHS – WINTER'S FOR REAL

FORT COLLINS, CO — Sunday, December 14, 2008

Dear winter weather watchers and avoiders

Tonight my feet are cold. The furnace can't quite keep up. After a balmy day here where we melted most of our remaining snow with temperatures up in the 50s and some Chinook winds, now we've dropped 25 degrees in just over an hour. It could be close to zero F by rain gauge checking time tomorrow (Sunday) morning. The National Weather Service national forecast maps -- <http://www.weather.gov> -- are painted with more colorful winter weather warnings/advisories than you can shake a snow stick at. Will our volunteers in the Dakotas and eastern Montana dare take measurements Sunday AM with blizzard conditions in process and temperatures below zero? We'll find out.

It's been snowing for weeks now from Wisconsin to New York. Two feet of snow on the level already covers the ground over parts of Michigan. Now winter has cut loose across warmer parts of the country with snow this past week in places like San Antonio, Galveston, Houston, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. Now it's Seattle, WA and Portland, OR's turn. Temperatures in the Pacific NW may stay below freezing for the entire next week -- the longest such cold wave in nearly 20 years. Quite a few of you risked the cold, slippery stuff this week to take some mighty fine measurements. We surely do appreciate your efforts. Also, there were some amazing rain gauge readings this past week as the storm dumped copious rainfall amounts from Mississippi to Rhode Island.

And then there's the freezing rain that coated parts of New England two days ago. CoCoRaHS hasn't made much headway in New England yet, but hopefully that will change this next spring. Here are some tips on how to measure and report freezing rain.

Measuring Glaze

Freezing rain (precipitation that falls as rain but which then freezes on contact with objects at the surface) produces one of nature's most beautiful and most troublesome phenomena -- glaze.

We rarely get freezing rain here in Colorado, and when we do it's usually only a very thin layer. We originally didn't even include instructions on how to report freezing rain. That was an oversight on our part. For parts of the country from Texas and Oklahoma all the way to New England, freezing rain and sleet are common and treacherous parts of winter weather. Measurements and reports of glaze are critically important.

If you receive freezing rain, measure it as if it were just rain -- melting and measuring the water content of what landed in your gauge. Freezing rain is NOT reported as snowfall since it falls as liquid, not ice. If you only get freezing rain, report the new snow as 0.0". However, in your "Comments" try to measure and report the average radius of the glaze on wires and branches above ground and the approximate thickness on surfaces like parked cars, picnic tables, etc. But PLEASE BE CAREFUL -- and just stay inside if it's too slippery.

We are posting some new instructions on the CoCoRaHS website specific to winter measurements. Thanks to our Illinois CoCoRaHS team who is conducting many training sessions this winter.

White dog - White Couch

Our animals have been well behaved of late -- no unusual visitors, and no extraordinary vet bills. I still can't quite explain why there are three brown horses in our barn now instead of two, but I've been told "that happens". It looks like we have enough hay to hold us through until next summer, so that's good.

And then there is this big white dog lying near me on our white couch. Angel, the Great Pyrenees, sort of showed up in the yard today. Our son (who lives next door and keeps her most of the time) didn't have a good explanation for how she got out of his yard. Meanwhile, against my wishes, orders and physical struggles, she pushed in the front door, ate the cat food, and then jumped up on the couch and has totally ignored me. As I type, she is snoring loudly. Her moving feet suggest a "chasing rabbits" dream in progress.

Water Year summaries -- at last

It has taken two months to wade through the many 2008 Water Year summary reports. At last we have now compiled a CoCoRaHS national summary (Thanks, Zach, for all your hard work to pull this together). Precipitation totals for stations with entirely complete records for the period October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008 show a range from only about 2" for the year in southern Nevada to over 70" in some locations in the southeast. One station in Oregon with incomplete records was right at 100" of water content for the year. Northwest Indiana had a huge year with over 60" of precipitation at several locations -- more than 40% greater than their long term averages.

We are posting the water year summary, individual station records and some WY2008 maps on the CoCoRaHS website this next week. I'll announce the link to the report as soon as we post it.

Donations Appreciated

December 2008 donations to CoCoRaHS are up to almost \$3,000. THANKS SO MUCH! With support from NOAA running out in 2009, donations of any size can really help and will ensure that we can continue CoCoRaHS for years to come. We keep dreaming of that anonymous gift of \$10 Million that would sustain the program for something close to forever, but since that hasn't shown up yet \$3,000 looks really good.

If you are considering making a donation, here is the link to the donation website.

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

It is fully secure and managed by our University's Foundation. We are a not-for-profit organization with the necessary IRS documentation. Donations are tax deductible, and you will promptly receive a receipt. Let us know if your gift is eligible for an employer match. You will NOT be put on any mailing lists through our university.

Some of you asked about PayPal. Unfortunately, we cannot accept donations via PayPal at this time. Several of you asked how the money will be spent. In a nutshell, we have three full time employees and a student helper (Julian, the Web Master and Web Developer, Zach the station administrator that signs up all the new volunteers and checks all the data and answers everybody's questions, and Henry who is the CoCoRaHS national coordinator). We also have several hundred dollars a month computer and communications expenses to keep the project

running. We have a great and hardworking team who are fun to work with and all "Cuckoo for CoCoRaHS". Some asked about making donations honoring Odie Bliss from the Colorado Climate Center/CoCoRaHS team who died suddenly this past summer. Odie always worked wonderfully with our high school and college student employees, so if you mention Odie with your donation we will make sure the funds are used to support student helpers.

If you have any other questions, please contact me directly and I'll do my best to answer.

Next CoCoRaHS state? Idaho

We'll be launching Idaho January 1. If you have friends or relatives there, please encourage them to join.

Goodnight, and stay warm.

Nolan