

The Catch

COCORAHS – HAPPY GROUNDHOG DAY

FORT COLLINS, CO — Monday, February 2, 2009

Good Morning CoCoRaHS rain gauge trackers:

Happy Groundhog Day

Today is a traditional fun-loving meteorological pseudo holiday -- Groundhog Day! and I just wanted to wish all of you a warm one. Back in Central Illinois where I grew up, my father used to make a big deal about taking me outside as a little boy at this time of year to notice the earlier sunrises and later sunsets. It turns out that Feb. 2 was a reminder to him to be serious about his garden preparations. For example, he would already have chosen his favorite sweet potato and be sprouting it in a jar of water, even though the sprouts he would grow could not be planted for several more months. As a boy I hated eating sweet potatoes, but it was great fun watching the best potato from the previous year sprout.

Ohio joins CoCoRaHS!

Today, February 2, 2009, Ohio officially joins CoCoRaHS. We will now begin filling one of the larger remaining gaps on the national map. Several newspaper articles as well as National Weather Service posting have been distributed. Already 82 Ohioans have signed up. Welcome aboard!! Next up will be Massachusetts in March.

USA Today

I just got word that CoCoRaHS is in the news today and one of our volunteers has their picture in the national paper (Congrats). Here is the link that I was just sent:

http://www.usatoday.com/weather/research/2009-02-01-weather-volunteers_N.htm

Severe weather preparation

This was (and still is) an important time of year to begin taking severe weather preparations very seriously. For many parts of the country, the tornado season is near at hand or just around the corner. As I scan National Weather Service office home pages from various parts of the country (<http://www.weather.gov>) I notice that many forecast offices are posting their schedules for severe weather spotter training classes and other weather awareness activities. I know that many of you are already involved with your local National Weather Service offices. If not and this sounds interesting to you, please check to see what classes may be offered near you and try to attend. Severe weather is exciting but very serious stuff. Do what you can to be well educated and well prepared.

An obvious void

Did you notice the national CoCoRaHS precipitation maps these past few days? After that whopping ice storm went up the Ohio Valley last week, our CoCoRaHS maps suddenly had a large data void. You can probably guess the problem -- power outages. Without electricity, few CoCoRaHS observers are able to report and a big hole of no data showed up over NW Tennessee, SE Missouri and western KY. (By the way, thanks for the amazing photos that some of you sent -- and the many great reports of ice, sleet and snow that we did get. Thanks for your efforts to try to gather good data in a very difficult situation. I used to know ice storms intimately in my years in Illinois, but it's just not something we see here in northern Colorado).

We saw a similar data void phenomenon last summer when the hurricane knocked out power over large portions of Louisiana. I realize that a few of you manage to fire up generators and somehow got back on line, but it is clear that a "soft side" of CoCoRaHS will be power outages. We are very, very close to having a cell phone text messaging system to serve as alternative and backup system (and that won't always work, either). So for now as we get more and more dots on the maps, CoCoRaHS can just serve as a power outage detection network.

And remember, when the power does come back on and your lives return to normal, you can always go back and enter the data for past dates. If

you have questions or need help, please contact your local CoCoRaHS coordinator.

Happy horses

Oops, I somehow failed to properly latch the coral gates Saturday after repairing the wall and doorway of the barn that the horses had kicked off the foundation. As a result, we awoke yesterday to find three large brown and cheerful beasts grazing in our yard and garden. Fortunately, with the lure of some fresh hay, Rafindy, Missy and Rosie all strolled back to the barn without harm or damage.

Weighing Snow

Well, we're past the half-way point (typically) in the winter snow season, and I still haven't provided the detailed instructions on the alternative approach to measuring the water content of snow and ice. I was surprised to learn that quite a few of you already had good kitchen or laboratory scales and have already been weighing snow. Good job.

I am not an expert on scales. The really good ones cost enough to be prohibitive, and the cheap ones may not have the range or accuracy that we need. If you can find scales that read to the nearest 1 gram (0.1 gram is better), and have the capacity of at least a few kilograms, you can probably give it a try. Remember, you need to know the weight of your outer tube when it's empty first and you will likely need to recalibrate on a regular basis.

The tricky part of measuring snow the water content of snow by weight is that you need to make sure that all snow, ice and water that may be stuck to the outside of your gauge **MUST** be cleaned off before measuring.

One of you "snow weighers" kindly sent some recommendations of scales that may be suitably priced and be sufficiently accurate.

Amazon.com has an American Weigh AMW-1000 scale with a 0.1 gram resolution and 1kg capacity. That is enough for the 4" tube with 2.5" of water. The current price is \$28.00.

Amazon also has a Escali Primo Digital Multifunctional Scale with 1 gram resolution and 5kg capacity. This would be enough for the 4" tube full of water. The current price is \$25.00

So long for now!

Have a good week as we begin to transition away from "Deep Winter". I hope that storm in the Pacific manages to find it's way inland and give our California CoCoRaisins a chance to use their new gauges.

I'll be speaking tomorrow and Wednesday at the Colorado Conservation Tillage Association annual meeting in Greeley, Colorado. This group is made of farmers and related businesses who manage to grow good crops without irrigation on lands that receive less than 18" of rainfall per year on average -- and who care and benefit from each and every inch that falls. My hats are off to these folks. In addition to sharing climate information with a very receptive audience, I hope to sign up at least 5 new volunteers, so wish me luck.

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