

The Catch

COCORAHS – LATE FEBRUARY UPDATE

FORT COLLINS, CO — Friday, February 27, 2009

Greetings from CoCoRaHS

We've added more than 400 new volunteers since my last letter (many from Ohio, Thanks!!). So I better make an introduction. You may still be trying to figure out what CoCoRaHS is and does. The abbreviation stands for the "Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow" network. We're a large and growing community of people (children, adults, seniors, professionals, beginners, everything in between) all across the country who share or are developing an interested in weather, climate and/or water. We measure and report the amount of rain and snow (and hail) that falls on our yards. In the process, we are able to map and track precipitation patterns across our very large and diverse country. See this for yourself by viewing the maps on our homepage www.cocorahs.org This project started in northern Colorado in the late 1990s after a really major but highly localized flash flood hit us here in Fort Collins in 1997. Since the early 2000s, CoCoRaHS has been spreading quickly and now covers most of the country.

By the way, welcome to Massachusetts, the latest state to join CoCoRaHS! There will be an official CoCoRaHS launch ceremony on Monday, March 2, 2009 at the historic headquarters of the American Meteorological Society on Beacon Street in downtown Boston. Tell your friends and family from Massachusetts that they can now sign up.

If you are receiving this e-mail and wondering why, it's because you signed up to be a CoCoRaHS volunteer (some people forget). I try to send out a letter to everyone about every two to three weeks to keep you posted on progress, provide tips and suggestions for taking better measurements, and just to stay in touch. This series of newsletters is called "The Catch" and is also posted to the CoCoRaHS website. You can go back and check past newsletters when you have time. <http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=catch>

If you are new to CoCoRaHS, welcome!! If you have questions let us know. We have a network of state, regional and local (in some counties) volunteer coordinators across the country who are ready to answer your questions and help you get started.

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

Since we last spoke

It has been more than 3 weeks since my last note. Thanks to those who pointed out my unfortunate misspelling of "Groundhog Day" in that last message. The way I spelled it (Ground Hog) implied pork sausage -- sorry about that.

Here are some recent highlights. Since Feb 2nd we've had:

-- a whopping localized lake-effect snow blitz in northwest Indiana in early February (over 2 feet in some areas)

-- stormy weather in California that has brought some temporary, partial but welcome drought relief with over a foot of rain in the Santa Cruz mountains and other parts of northern California

-- a major severe weather outbreak in TX and OK that included tornadoes and large hail Check out the February 10th, 2009 U.S. hail map at

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Maps/ViewMap.aspx?state=usa>

-- a brief round of heavy rains across the Midwest (including some big rains yesterday and last night)

-- a mountain rain here in Colorado up to elevations of 10,000 feet earlier this week (we prefer snow this time of year)

-- little rain over much of Texas and Florida where drought is already present and getting worse. We have many diligent observers in southern Texas around San Antonio with less than half their average rainfall over the past 18 months

-- there were many other events of interest nationwide -- snow, rain, and lack thereof -- too many to describe

Here at our house in Fort Collins, February has been warmer than average, windy at times and dry. As February comes to an end, my precipitation total stands at 0.22" -- about half our average. In mid-winter we are often "protected" or "blocked" from the winter storms that hit the nearby Rocky Mountains from the Pacific. That leaves you in a rain/snow shadow. That has certainly been the case here this winter. Weather patterns usually begin changing in March with more and wetter storms. I hope so. We need moisture!

The sun is winning

You wouldn't know it from today's cold wave across the U.S. Northern Plains (-20F in parts of North Dakota and Minnesota as I type this message), but the sun is winning its battle against winter. As we move swiftly towards spring, each day the sun climbs higher and the day length (time between sunrise and sunset) gets longer. This is especially obvious for our volunteers up in Alaska who, by this time of year, are eager for brighter and longer days.

While we welcome the longer days, especially those of us living in colder and more northern locations, the increasing day length can also mean livelier storms. There is much truth to the old weather folklore that says "*As the days grow longer the storms grow stronger*". We have made it through the worst of winter, but now we face the main "severe weather season" for the American heartland. If you live in any of the many tornado prone areas of our stormy country, remember this is the time of year when your NWS (National Weather Service) offices are out recruiting and training storm spotters and working to get communities ready for the severe storm season. If this interests you, please get involved. And if you go to one of the NWS or local TV training sessions, also do some recruiting for CoCoRaHS. :-)

Hail? We need your reports

A reminder that we have a special report form on CoCoRaHS to report hail. Hail pads are very helpful for documenting the number and size and hardness of hail, but you DO NOT need to have hail pads to submit hail reports. Take a look now. When you click "My Data" on the top menu line of the CoCoRaHS website, it takes you (if you're logged in) to the default "Daily Precipitation Report Form". Then, if you look to the left, there is a menu with a heading "Enter My New Reports" The second one down is "Hail". If you are having hail or as soon as you can safely get online after a storm ends, please enter the "Hail Report" filling in the information that you can and skipping over the parts that you do not know. These hail reports go directly and immediately to the National Weather Service office that covers your area. The reports also form a data base for studying hail storms across the country.

We see many of you note "Hail" in the comments of your regular daily precipitation report. That is good and much appreciated. But to include your hail report in our research database, also fill out the specific hail report. For the date and time, remember to correctly

select the date on which the hail actually fell, and correctly select AM or PM. Many thanks for helping with this part of the CoCoRaHS project.

"CoCoRaHS March Madness" -- friendly CoCoRaHS competition

It is time for our annual "*CoCoRaHS March Madness*" competition where we see which state can add the most new volunteers during the 31 days of March. Last year, South Carolina took the prize, with Illinois and Indiana (sounds about right for "March Madness") winning in previous years. This year we've set our goal for 1000 new volunteers during March. You can help. Do your best to encourage others that you know to join CoCoRaHS and experience the "*thrill*" (OK, I may be exaggerating a bit) of measuring and reporting daily precipitation. California and Ohio may have the inside track right now with strong recruiting campaigns already underway. We'll see what strategies other states will take to keep up. Personally, I'm pulling for North Dakota and I would love to see Colorado make a strong showing this year. There are still many large gaps to fill. We need more dots on our maps. We will post scoring updates each week during March on our "Message of the Day". Go, fight, win!!!

Help with rain gauges

This isn't a big surprise, but with the economy as it is and the struggles some of us face, the cost of obtaining a rain gauge has become a barrier to CoCoRaHS participation. Some would love to help out but just can't justify spending money on a rain gauge right now.

We recently polled the CoCoRaHS state volunteer coordinators and there is a need for over 2000 rain gauges right now.. I am beginning to work on a "Rain Gauges for CoCoRaHS" campaign but have not made much progress yet. If you have contacts -- storm water and flood plain management organizations, Emergency Management, Water Utilities, Conservation Districts, etc. -- some of these organizations may be willing to purchase a few gauges for the volunteers in your area. If you can help get some rain gauges donated, our coordinators will do their best to get them to the people that need them.

A bad day on the farm

We had been enjoying a peaceful winter on our little old (1904 -- old for Colorado, at least) farmstead. Our animals made it through deep winter

with no illness, predator problems, or other animal crises. That all changed abruptly on Friday, February 13th. I am not superstitious in the least, and still aren't, but it was not a good Friday the 13th here. Angel, our younger of two Great Pyrenees, had a run in with the dog catcher. She lives next door with our son and his roommates in the house where Grandma (my mother-in-law) lived until she passed away in 2006. Angel somehow got out of the fenced yard and garden area. When the "Animal Control" officer found her and took her to the "Pound" they caught her with a chicken in her mouth. Where she found that chicken, I can't tell you. All I know is we now have a summons to appear in court. Bummer. Thank you, Angel.

Later that day, my wife had just come home and it was dark. Our Australian Shepherd, "Soxie" came to the gate to greet her -- just like always. However, this time as she approached Kathy she twitched, stumbled and within a few seconds was dead at the feet of her loving master -- apparently of a stroke or some such. The next day I dug a grave under our nearest compost pile. We had forgotten that Soxie was getting up in years as her coat had not changed and she remained limber and playful. But when we checked, we remembered she was born in 1996 and had lived a good life. We are still in mourning two weeks later and we miss her enthusiastic greetings. But I guess if you have to go (and we all do) this was a good passing.

That's not all. With the distraction of two dog disasters on the same day, we were a little late doing the rest of the chores. When Kathy came in from securing the geese and chickens in the chicken coop, she noticed we were one goose short. I bundled up and took the flashlight and after a long search making goose calls and getting no answer, I found the remains of one of our white domestic geese down in the irrigation ditch behind the barn. Most likely a fox had been enjoying dinner. We see fox around almost all the time watching our fowl in hopes one makes a mistake. I have no great emotional attachment to the geese. One bit me yesterday while I was putting out some grain and I now have a nice bruise on my leg. The geese apparently haven't heard the saying "don't bite the hand that feeds you". Still that was a low blow to have three animal mishaps the same day.

February Flies

In closing, thanks for all that you do, have done, and hope to do to help measure and study our rain, hail and snow patterns across the country. We appreciate your help very much. And as you do, please try to keep your eyes open and enjoy what nature has to offer. Some of you have

sent some amazing cloud, snow and ice pictures this winter. Thanks so much. There is beauty to be seen all around, when we take the time to look.

I don't spend as much time enjoying the beauties of nature as I should, but I did get to see something the other day that made me stop and take notice. After several cold days and a little snow, I was out cleaning frozen horse manure from the corral and tossing it on the compost pile. As the morning sun rose and cast some warmth on the manure, there I saw the first fly of the year. Where did it come from? How did it survive? Why was it flying around on such a cold, February morning? I'm not sure you would call "February flies on the manure pile" a great beauty of nature, but it did provide some needed distraction. That is one of the great things about doing chores. In fact, it's time to feed the horses right now.

A great March to all of you, and good luck to your state in "CoCoRaHS March Madness".

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