The Catch

COCORAHS – ALMOST SPRING

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, March 19, 2009

Greetings from CoCoRaHS Colorado

It's getting close to that day -- the first day of Spring. We don't forget that day in our household because it's our youngest child's birthday. And this is a big one. Joel turns 21. Yikes. He's been a good rain gauge reader since he was ten. Maybe it's time for his own gauge now.

When Joel was born in 1988, Fort Collins was having one of our snowiest March's in history -- 38" as I recall. But his birthday was nicely tucked between two big storms on a warm and sunny Sunday. This year is so different. Almost every day has been warm and sunny, and only 1.8" of snow has fallen in what historically is our snowiest month of the year. The dust in the corral is thick but feathery light -- ready to go flying with the slightest gust of wind or stomp of hooves. Bring us some moisture!

While our area is beginning to flirt with drought (as we often to) it has been great to see rains over some of the driest parts of the country. Northern California -- and the Redding area in particular -- measure 4 - 6.5" of rain just this week (Good job, Shasta County CoCoRaisins). Today several inches of rain fell over parched areas of southeast Florida. Last week, Texas finally get a round of widespread rains with 2 to as much as 6" over some very dry areas. I think I could hear the dancing in the streets all the way up here.

Leafing, blossoming, blooming and chirping

Speaking of spring, we've seen some good comments in the daily precipitation reports describing early flowers popping and blooming. This reminds me that I want to give you an update on the National Phenology Network. This program is an extensive effort to track the seasonal

progression of various plants as well as some migratory birds and insects.

If you are a devoted nature lover, or if you know of other plant and animal watchers, or if you're just a curious record keeper, please consider sharing your (or their) time, talents and interests to help track seasonal changes. This project is a lot like CoCoRaHS in that the more people from more places that participate, the more and quicker scientists and participants are able to get a handle on what's going on.

Here is the announcement that I just received. Interestingly, one of the scientists quoted in the article is also a CoCoRaHS volunteers. Mark Schwartz was the first Milwaukee, WI CoCoRaHS volunteer to sign up in 2007 and he hasn't missed reporting ever since. So please visit their website. If it interests you, please sign up and help.

Taking the Pulse of our Planet:

Volunteers Needed to Track Seasonal Signs of Climate Change

Volunteers across the nation are being recruited to get outdoors and help track the effects of climate on seasonal changes in plant and animal behavior. The USA-National Phenology Network (USA-NPN), a consortium of government, academic and citizen-scientists, is launching a new national program built on volunteer observations of flowering, fruiting and other seasonal events. Scientists and resource managers will use these observations to track effects of climate change on the Earth's life-support systems.

"This program is designed for people interested in participating in climate change science, not just reading about it," said USA-NPN Executive Director and U.S. Geological Survey scientist Jake Weltzin. "We encourage everyone to visit the website (_http://www.usanpn.org/_) and then go outside and observe the marvelous cycles of plant and animal life." Phenology is the study of the seasonal cycles of plant and animals, such as plants sprouting, flowering and fruiting, and animals reproducing, migrating and hibernating. Changes in these patterns, caused by climate change or other factors, can significantly affect human economies and health. In some areas, such changes have already imperiled species.

The USA-NPN monitoring program harnesses the power of people and the Internet to vastly increase the data available to scientists and the public alike, Weltzin said. The program provides easy-to-use methods to

track the life cycles of nearly 200 species of plants, and will begin monitoring animals next year. Mark D. Schwartz, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and chair of the USA-NPN board of directors, said "My work with lilac phenology and models has shown that by monitoring these events across large areas over time, researchers can better understand and predict global climate change impacts. Once the USA-NPN has collected enough data, we will be able to develop tools to help mitigate and adapt to ongoing and future climate change." For example, data collected by USA-NPN will help resource managers predict wildfire risk and pollen production, detect and control invasive species, monitor droughts, and assess the vulnerability of various plant and animal species to climate change.

The USA-NPN National Coordinating Office is based at The University of Arizona in Tucson. USA-NPN is built upon partnerships among citizen scientists, government agencies, nongovernment organizations, academic researchers, educators and the public. The rapidly expanding network includes collaborations among the U.S. Geological Survey, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, The University of Arizona, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Wildlife Society.

CoCoRaHS' most common question -- to zero or not to zero?

Week in and week out, the most common question we get from our volunteers is "If it doesn't rain, do I still need to report?" Our answer hasn't changed. You are volunteers, and we know your time may be limited. But if at all possible, please do report your zero each day. Sometimes we can infer from surrounding stations that you were dry, but unless you report, we'll never know for sure. We try to make it as easy and quick as possible to report Zero (0.00"). We even fill out a zero for you as a default. But you still need to go to the effort of hitting "submit". The other alternative is to use the "Monthly Zeros" report to go back and view each month's reports for your station. You can then click a box for each day with no precipitation. In a few seconds you're done and your records are complete.

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

The next most common question is "Does anyone ever look at my data?" Each day weather forecasters, other scientists, businesses, teachers, and who knows who all else are looking at CoCoRaHS data, extracting data, doing research, making decisions and very much counting on the

thousands of good measurements that come in each day. Do not fear. Your data ARE being used and appreciated.

Ready for the Big One

You may find this difficult to believe, but the chances are that within the next few months several of us will experience a storm that completely fills our gauge (and that's approximately 11.30" of rain -- a scary large amount). Since CoCoRaHS first expanded to the Midwest and the Gulf Coast states, we have seen 11" + daily rains each year. It is bound to happen again. In fact, with Tropical Storm Fay last August, we had daily rainfall of 11" or more on several days in a row and some rain amounts over 14" per day.

The chance of you getting 11" or more in one day in your gauge is fortunately very small. That kind of rain causes huge flooding. But the chances that at least one of us somewhere in the country will get 11" or more of rain in a day are great. I hope like crazy that when "The Big One" comes that we're ready. And if at all possible, if you know you are having a whopper, go out and read and empty the gauge during a break in the storm and before the outer tube is more than half full. It is really awkward handling the gauge when it is so full. Of course, sometimes the rains come at night or when you are at work and you won't have a chance to empty the gauge midway. Then all I can say is do your best. Perhaps you could quickly set out a can or some other container to help you estimate the amount of rain that spilled out.

Rainfall amounts with intense convective storms vary greatly over short distances. If there is a very large (greater than 6-8") rain in your area and you learn that others nearby that are not CoCoRaHS volunteers may have received even heavier amounts, be sure to find out as much as you can and include that information in your "Comments".

Also remember that a timely report of intense rain may be just what the National Weather Service needs to help issue a Flash Flood Warning. If you are experiencing very heavy rains, please remember to use the CoCoRaHS "Intense Precipitation Report" form. Your report goes directly to the local National Weather Service office and could help keep people safe and dry and maybe even save lives by helping alert people downstream from you. Don't forget. Your extra effort during times of heavy rainfall can be really, really important.

http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/IntensePrecipReport.aspx

Also remember, that even if you submitted an intense precipitation report that you still need to submit the regular daily precipitation report the next morning.

March Madness CoCoRaHS style

There are only 13 days left in our annual CoCoRaHS recruiting competition. Once again, despite my best efforts, Colorado is doing poorly. :-(with only one or two new recruits. Nationwide, the number is closer to 300. Texas is starting to pull out to a large lead now. In fact, for the first time ever Texas is beginning to have more rain reports each day than Colorado. Go Colorado! But I think we're outnumbered.

7,000

We hit 7,000 reports per day back in November. But then the weather turned cold and the mornings were dark and our numbers dropped off to about 6,000 reports per day. The ice and snow are gone now over much of the country, so polish up your gauge, remember your CoCoRaHS login, and let's get back over 7,000 in time for the upcoming spring storms.

Court Date

Monday is the day. We'll find out what offenses Angel (our Great Pyrenees) has been charged with. Let's hope for a lenient judge. Otherwise, it has been peaceful on our little farm. The chickens are laying left and right but they recently shifted to the right (northerly) laying boxes instead of the left (southerly) ones that they preferred all winter. Very interesting indeed.

CoCoRaHS questions?

If you need any help, please contact your local or regional CoCoRaHS volunteer coordinator or send an e-mail to our "Help Desk" at info@cocorahs.org

I am taking Thursday off to do some household projects so I won't be checking or replying to e-mail.

Best to all,
Nolan