

The Catch

COCORAHS – A GAUGE EVERY MILE??

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, May 28, 2009

Hello rain gaugers,

For once in my life, I'll be brief.

I just wanted to bring to your attention the curious weather pattern of the past week. A storm system that doused Florida and abruptly and convincingly ended their dry season (many, many inches of rain in some areas -- and the daily tropical thundershowers have been erupting ever since) drifted towards the northwest and ended up heading all the way May (usually moving from west to east). At the same time, in our part of the country, a late-summerlike "monsoonal flow" brought moisture up across old Mexico bringing several days of rain and localized intense downpours to AZ, NM, UT and Colorado. 1-3" rains fell in many areas out here. If you like cool, fragrant damp weather, it was awesome. If you like sunny, dry Memorial Day Weekend camping weather, it was the pits. But so it goes. For a climatologist like me, it was fascinating!

Heavy showers were numerous and very, very localized during this episode. Only in places where we have close to one or more CoCoRaHS participants per square mile were we able to capture the details of the recent rainfall patterns. I know you sometimes think I'm crazy wishing we had one volunteer per square mile across the country, but at this time of year that's how many we need to reasonably depict storm patterns. Even then it's not always enough. On Friday evening I helped a friend move. At our house it barely sprinkled. 1.5 miles south of our house there was a furious rainstorm with water over the curbs and the ground covered with hail. Another 1.5 miles to the south -- no rain. So thanks so much for your reports and encourage others to join -- even if it's just for these few summer months when rainfall is most intense and most variable.

Heading towards 8,000

We are on our way to reaching the "8,000 CoCoRaHS reports per day" milestone. May 5th 2009 is our record day so far with 7,749 entries. We're over 7000 reports almost every day now. I'm not sure we'll reach our goal of 10,000 reports per day by the end of 2009, but it's possible. 13,409 CoCoRaisins have reported at least once in the past year, so if we all happened to report on the same day, we would crush the our record. Let's do it! EVERYONE -- Please report on JUNE 1!!! Let's hit 8,000!

Yesterday (5/27/09) set another record. With over 7,000 volunteers reporting in, 5,140 of us had measurable amounts of rain in our gauges. Except for Oregon, rain fell somewhere in almost every other state (just a few showers in the high Sierras of California). From the Rocky Mountains eastward, showers were scattered all over the place. Having 70% of our gauges getting rain on the same day is very unusual and I wanted to share that with you.

What is Dew Point?

Your local meteorologists must have been talking about the high dew, points of the past week. Several of you wrote to ask me about the "Dew Point". What is it? "Dew point" is a good way of quantifying the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere. It is a more meaningful term, in some respects, than "Relative Humidity" which we have heard talked about all our lives. The dew point is a temperature. Specifically, is the temperature that you would need to cool the air to for the air to reach saturation (100% humidity). At that temperature, cloud droplets may begin to form, or dew will be deposited on surfaces in contact with the air. The higher the dew point, the more moisture is in the air. Here in Colorado, when the dew point gets higher than about 52 degrees F, we think it's really humid. But in the south, Midwest and East, you would think that air is really dry. You don't get excited until the dew point is over 65 or 70 degrees. A good way to get an idea about how humid the air is, is to check for condensation on a glass of ice water. In the winter, you hardly ever get water on the outside of a glass (unless you're down by the Gulf of Mexico), but this past weekend many of us had condensation on our glasses even here in Fort Collins. From now through August high dew point temperatures are the norm for much of the country. So get used to it. The corn loves it.

The CoCoRaHS questionnaire

I didn't get it finished yet, so wait a few more days and we'll be sending it out. Please take the time to fill it out.

Puppy on the farm

As for the farm, the grass is green and growing, our first irrigation water arrived in the ditch today -- and our new puppy (little Lily) is cute, lively, and has chewed up more stuff than I ever imagined. I couldn't find my favorite pair of leather gloves -- but she did. Tonight, we're planting the tomatoes in the garden. The pup will not be invited. Egg production has dropped sharply again as some of the hens are "broody". We stuck some goose eggs under them to make them feel useful. We'll see what happens.

Best wishes to all of you. Have a great summer. And starting June 1st, tell your friends in Hawaii to sign up for CoCoRaHS. And don't forget. Please report, rain or shine, on June 1 and see if we can surge past 8,000 reports.

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University