

The Catch

COCORAHS GIVES THANKS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, November 25, 2009

Dear CoCoRaHS volunteers, friends and family members;

On this Thanksgiving eve, I want to say thanks to all of you for your small, yet collectively very large, contributions to science and education. Reading a rain gauge and sharing the data each day doesn't sound like much to most people, but together we are doing something quite remarkable. We're tracking and mapping almost every storm that streams across our country bringing water to our land. This is a big deal, and something you should be proud of.

Each morning as I watch the CoCoRaHS national map light up with data – starting first on the East Coast, then spreading west across the Mississippi River, and then across the Rockies to the West Coast and finally to Hawaii and Alaska -- I am just plain amazed at what a team of loosely linked volunteers can do -- with a little help from the internet. Sometimes I have trouble believing we're doing this. Thanks so much -- and keep it up.

50th State

There is special cause for celebration this week. Minnesota joins CoCoRaHS December 1. CoCoRaHS will then be active in all 50 states. In fact, it looks like a few people have already signed up early, and a few data points are appearing on the MN map. We have worked out the details, and we now have a good plan for integrating MN into the CoCoRaHS network while still preserving the integrity of their long-time high density network of over 1000 volunteers.

<http://climate.umn.edu/HIDENsityEdit/HIDENweb.htm>

We may say that MN is the last state to join CoCoRaHS, but in fact they were the first state to establish a high density volunteer network to

supplement the official weather station networks first established by the National Weather Service. It is an honor for us to get to work together with the team from Minnesota. Within a few months you'll be pleased to see that MN already has over 1,000 people checking their rain gauge each day. So perhaps it's no surprise that MN is the state where the rain gauges that we use in CoCoRaHS are manufactured.

Still getting started?

There is never a bad time to get started taking precipitation measurements. We've had a few people who signed up 3–5 years ago and are just now getting started sending in measurements. That's fine. We don't mind. If you are new to CoCoRaHS, or just now ready to get started for the first time, review the training materials, make sure you have your gauge in a good location, and then get started. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your state, regional or local CoCoRaHS coordinator (<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=coord>) or send your questions to info@cocorahs.org

Time to get serious about measuring snow

Up until now, only a few hundred of us have had to deal with snow measurements this winter. Here in Colorado we've already had plenty of practice (35" at our house). But many of you have yet to see your first flakes. Next week looks stormy, and for the next 3+ months storms may occasionally dip deep into the South bringing at least a little snow to much of the country. Be ready.

There are few rewards for being a winter weather observer. Hats off to all of you who are willing to brave the cold, the wind and the dark to go out and measure winter precipitation!! But remember, if it's too icy -- the observation can always wait. It's not worth breaking a bone to get a good measurement of ice or snow for CoCoRaHS.

Joys, sorrows, struggles, and small victories

To conclude, I have to share a short message with you that I recently received from a CoCoRaHS volunteer. This is tough, but here goes:

Hi, Nolan Doesken

I have only been with you only about a few years. I was a meteorologist in my military days, am 75 years, and am in my final weeks with cancer. From here on out, I will do the best I can to get the data in on time, but sometimes that will not be possible. Thank you. It's been a fun job.

Regards,

Wow, this one really hit me. When we started CoCoRaHS we were thinking science, but what we've discovered along the way is humanity. In the 11+ years since we started CoCoRaHS, we've received several letters like this one. That doesn't make it any easier. The fact of the matter is, we're human, and life isn't always easy, and life doesn't last forever -- even at Thanksgiving. Much of our lives we feel young and active -- and then so quickly we're not anymore. We have our good days and our bad ones (our son found out today that one of his friends from grade school was killed in a car accident coming home from college for the holiday.). We are honored and very humbled when we realize that CoCoRaHS matters this much to some of us.

To those of us who are struggling today, and for those who have lost precious ones this year, and for those of us who are sad or lonely for whatever reason -- I wish I had words to make things better, but mostly I don't. I've learned a few things from CoCoRaHS and our volunteers, though. One is that each sunrise, each sunset, each rain shower, each clap of thunder, each rainbow -- and each successful trip to the rain gauge -- is something worth being thankful for.

Recruit a few over dinner

On the lighter side, please have a Happy Thanksgiving as best you can -- and if dinner conversation gets slow, you could always bring up the subject of CoCoRaHS :-) Maybe you'll even have a chance to recruit a cousin, aunt, uncle or even grandpa to join CoCoRaHS.

*Nolan Doesken
Fort Collins, Colorado*