

The Catch

COCORAHS - A LONG WINTER SOON WILL END

FORT COLLINS, CO — Monday, February 22, 2010

Monday Morning CoCoRaHS Greetings:

The long winter

With one week left in February, we're waking up to the sound of snow plows on our street once again here in northern Colorado. In fact, it's been snowing on and off for 4 straight days and our seasonal snowfall total is up to almost 70 inches. Our traditionally snowiest month is still ahead of us - March. It's a winter wonderland out there just like it was in late December, early December, mid November, late October. Wait, when did winter begin this year? It's been a long one, and it's not likely over yet.

Checking the CoCoRaHS map of total depth of snow on ground Sunday morning, there was plenty of snow from Reno, NV to Flagstaff, AZ to Dodge City, KS, to Cincinnati, Ohio and on to the Great Smoky Mountains, up to Washington DC and on to New England. In fact, it looked like about half the lower 48 states are still covered with snow. The Mid-Atlantic snow pack is retreating now after their huge storms, but many areas still have a good foot or more of water-soaked snow left on the ground (and thanks so much to everyone that takes that measurement). Much of Iowa has been dealing with deep snow since the beginning of December. Even places like Cincinnati have been pushing deep snow around for over two weeks. As the snow persists, fewer of us are keeping up with the measurements. Is it possible that people are "sick of winter" :-)?

By the way, check out the maps in the Reno, NV yesterday and today. They got pounded by a surprise local storm. Everyone seems to be taking a turn at measuring snow this year.

Hang in there - the SWE will eventually be gone

Measuring deep, old, icy snow is neither easy nor necessarily enjoyable, but we appreciate all of you who have tried your best to measure the new snow, the water content, the total depth of snow and the snow water equivalent (SWE) of the total snow depth on the ground. Since we started doing “Monday SWE” a few weeks ago, over 500 of us have taken Monday morning core samples from the snow left on the ground to determine the “snow water equivalent”. The folks at the National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center and many of our River Forecast Centers across the country greatly appreciate these measurements. They help forecasters anticipate how much water is available in the snow to contribute to soil moisture, runoff, and river flow in the weeks ahead. Keep those measurements coming until your snow is completely gone.

Many questions arose from the “SWE Monday” campaign. Here are a few quick answers to common questions:

“Where do I enter this information?”

Answer: It’s our regular daily “Precipitation Report Form” under “Total Snow and Ice on Ground at Observation Time”

“I can’t get a good measure of the water content. Is it OK if I just report the total snow depth and skip the SWE?”

Answer: Yes, that helps a lot too. Do what you can.

“I’m not as agile as I used to be. Can I opt out of this report?”

Answer: Yes, measuring snow depth and SWE are important, but optional. Please don’t risk hurting yourself on ice and snow for CoCoRaHS.

“What if we think the snow is going to melt during the week, before we can measure the next Monday?”

Answer: The “SWE Monday” campaign is primarily for areas with deep and persistent snow cover where it is not practical to measure every day. For most areas of the country, snow may only stay on the ground a few days. In those areas, it’s best to measure each and every day while you have the chance. If the SWE changes a lot from day to day due to new precipitation or melting, it’s also a good idea to send in more than just one report per week.

“If I report SWE on Monday, does that mean you don’t want my daily precipitation reports the other days of the week?”

Answer: Continue to do your regular daily precipitation report each day, including new snow and total snow depth.

“I live in New York and I was told specifically to report SWE on Wednesdays. Now I’m confused.”

Answer: We learned that in some parts of the country, the local practice was to measure the SWE on Wednesday or Fridays, and not Monday’s. Sorry for the confusion. If you have received specific instructions from your CoCoRaHS coordinator to measure and report SWE on a different day, stick with your local instructions. Or if you can do both, that’s good too.

Storm Warning!

It may still seem like winter, but the severe thunderstorm season can start any day now across the southern states and quickly move up into the Midwest and the Ohio Valley. My home county in central Illinois, Champaign County, took several direct hits from tornadoes in March when I was growing up there. It is something we must take seriously.

Please be ready for the 2010 severe weather season. If you are concerned about tornadoes, I strongly encourage you to check your local National Weather Service website and find out about severe weather spotter training sessions for your area. <http://www.weather.gov>

Be prepared to measure and report hail. We’ve had over 70 reports of hail already this year, but there will be many more storms in the months ahead. If you plan to use hail pads to measure and report hail (and we recommend it), this is a good time to make sure you have a couple of fresh, new hail pads ready to install. There are instructions on the website on how to make your own. Don’t wait until the last minute, or the storm will hit and you’ll still have the pad indoors.

Remember, we have a special report form on the CoCoRaHS website specifically for reporting hail. Get familiar with it. You don’t need to have a hail pad in order to report hail.

March Madness, CoCoRaHS style

A traditional part of spring is our annual “March Madness” friendly competition to see what states can sign up the most new CoCoRaHS volunteers. This will be the first year where all 50 states are in the competition. Take advantage of this opportunity to help recruit more participants for CoCoRaHS. If you know of anyone who might be interested, point them to <http://www.cocorahs.org> <<http://www.cocorahs.org/>> and click “Join CoCoRaHS”. We’ll post the scores each week in our “Message of the Day” so we can all track the results.

By the way, we've been holding steady at between 6,800 and 8,000 CoCoRaHS reports per day most of the winter, but as the weather warms up we hope to shoot for 10,000 reports per day by May.

Zero is better than nothing

We appreciate knowing both when it does rain and snow, and when it doesn't. It only takes about five seconds to send in your daily report when there was no precipitation, and it really helps. Thanks.

A fresh new face in CoCoRaHS

I just wanted to let you know that there is a new baby in the CoCoRaHS family. Julian Turner, our web developer who maintains the website and all the millions of CoCoRaHS data records, and his wife are the proud parents of their second child -- a baby girl born over the weekend. Little "Alden Grace Turner" is very small - less than 4 pounds - and will be in neonatal intensive care for awhile. But Julian reports that she is feisty and ready for action. We wish them the best.

Drought Impacts

In the last two weeks we added a new feature to the CoCoRaHS website - the ability to report drought impacts that you are observing or have observed in your area. We chose a convenient time to launch, because hardly any of the country is facing drought right now. But it is almost a sure bet that in the weeks ahead, some parts of the country will be on the short end of the stick when it comes to spring and summer rainfall.

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

When you have a minute, take a look at the drought impact information. Then, when you find your community experiencing the impacts of drought, please use the CoCoRaHS "Drought Impacts" entry form to let us know. Information provided will be shared with the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. By the way, you can always go back and enter a description of impacts you have observed in the past.

One less shirt, one less shoe, but many more eggs

Lily, our young Australian shepherd, is not on my good side right now. We had a few sunny days just over a week ago, and my wife hung some clothes out on the line. We weren't around to see it, but Lily managed to pull down my best dress shirt and chewed off the collar and a sleeve. There were several shirts on the line that I wouldn't have minded sacrificing, but she chose the best. Then on Saturday, while it was snowing hard, I left my shoes outside the door briefly so as to not track snow into the house, I was only inside for about 10 minutes, but when I came back, part of my new shoe that my daughter gave me for Christmas was chewed up. Bummer, I know it was my fault, but still -- -- I thought she was past that. On the brighter side, our chickens are laying eggs very well again, and the eggs are delicious.

In conclusion

Thanks again for being a part of CoCoRaHS. If you are new to this project and haven't gotten started yet, this would be a great day to begin.

Best wishes,

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