

The Catch

COCORAHS - MARCHING TOWARD SPRING

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Greetings, and a special welcome to all the new CoCoRaHS volunteers who have signed up in recent weeks. Welcome aboard!

Changes are happening fast now. Here at home, I'm happy to report that our horse corrals have started to dry out and only two large snowdrifts remain -- now less than a foot deep. Today was the first day since back in mid October when I didn't need snow boots or mud boots to do the chores. Also we got out in the garden for the first time this year and began some early soil preparations in hopes of planting some seeds in a few weeks. The temperature reached the mid 50s on Saturday and bees were out of the hive for the first time buzzing wildly in hopes of early blossoms but settling for some ground yellow corn in the chicken yard.

This coming Sunday we "Spring Forward" to Daylight Savings Time for most (not all) of the country. Don't forget to change your clocks. While there was still freezing temperatures in Florida this past weekend, for most of the country the temperatures are climbing now, snow is retreating and the word "Thunderstorms" is starting to appear on some weather forecasts for the upcoming week. There still haven't been many "Severe Thunderstorm or Tornado Watches and Warnings" but that could be coming soon enough. Across much of the country, National Weather Service meteorologists are busily organizing severe weather spotter and Skywarn training sessions to get us all prepared. Check the local NWS webpage for training sessions near you.

Arizona wins

This won't happen very often so enjoy it when you have the chance. Today (March 8th) 46 out of the 52 largest precipitation totals in the country were observed in the state of Arizona including 40 reports of 1.00" or greater. For Arizona, this was a very wet day. In fact, since

January 1 the CoCoRaHS precipitation observations show a statewide average of over 6" of precipitation so far this year. While that's not much for some parts of the country, for AZ this is great and a big change from last year.

Crazy New England storm

I didn't have a chance to mention it, but a big "Thanks" to all of you in New England that managed to help measure and report the monstrous storm of Feb 23–27th. That was wild. Winds were extreme and there were dozens of Maine rainfall totals exceeding 6" for the storm. Farther west in New Hampshire and parts of New York state, the snow piled up 3, 4 and even 5 feet deep on the level. And it wasn't fluff snow, either. There are probably some areas just now finally getting their electricity restored. Again, thanks for braving the storm to collect good data. Almost every week, some part of the country gets blasted. Will it be your turn next?

Don't forget Alaska and Hawaii

I have not given nearly enough credit to our small but committed team of CoCoRaHS volunteers in Alaska and Hawaii. Keep an eye on HI-HI-2 and HI-HI-4. These two stations are on the wet side of the Big Island of Hawaii and pretty much anything can happen when it comes to rain. They've experienced "Drought" this winter and yet the Pepeekeo CoCoRaHS station is up to 73" of rainfall since October 1. They may need a bigger gauge. Meanwhile, Alaska has enjoyed a relatively mild later half of winter and are now enjoying the rapid increase in day length.

March Madness, CoCoRaHS style

The 2010 CoCoRaHS "March Madness" is under way. That's our friendly competition to see which state can recruit the most new volunteers in one month. Winners from previous years include Illinois (2006), Indiana (2007), South Carolina (2008) and Texas (2009). This year, we've made things "interesting" by changing the scoring to account for variations in population. Points are based on the number of new recruits per 1,000,000 residents. With this new scoring system, North Dakota and Mississippi are in a close race, but Kansas (a perennial competitor) is close behind. Good luck to TX and CA. They will have to recruit a few hundred new volunteers this month to have any chance at all.

You can help

Yes, all of us can help our states compete for the new "CoCoRaHS Cup" trophy. Spread the word to friends, co-workers and family members. We have a press release that you can take to your local newspaper to try to drum up additional interest. Let me know if you would like a copy of the press release and we'll send it your way.

Of course this isn't all just fun and games. Drought, heavy rains, possible flooding, and hail may be just around the corner and we really want to make a difference this year by accurately tracking, mapping and early reporting every storm. The more volunteers we have to help, the more accurate we will be. I hope we can reach the 10,000 report milestone -- maybe in May or June. But what's to say we can't find a few thousand more weather enthusiasts to help out.

But does anyone care?

Almost every week I get e-mail from current or potential volunteers asking "But is it worth my time? Does anyone actually look at our data?" The answer is a resounding "Yes! I can't emphasize this enough. Our data get used!! Everywhere in the country, CoCoRaHS data are being looked at and used each and every day. One of the users is NOAA's Meteorological Assimilation Data Ingest System (/MADIS/) <<http://madis.noaa.gov/>> They pull data from our server each and every hour every hour of the day and night to get all the latest reports. Many of the National Weather Service River Forecast Centers are grabbing our reports every morning to help update their projections of streamflow and possible flooding. The need for better hydroclimatic data is one of the big reasons we've been promoting "SWE Mondays" to increase the number of reports from CoCoRaHS of the total water content in the old snow remaining on the ground. It has paid off with over 500 reports each Monday in late February. Local National Weather Service Forecast Offices are getting CoCoRaHS data and using them to help with forecasts, local storm warnings, forecast verifications and local climatology. Agribusinesses are examining CoCoRaHS data to improve their assessments of potential crop predictions.

This is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to who is using your data. TV stations, newspapers, school teachers, water utilities -- the list goes on. I hope to begin work soon on an article for WeatherWise Magazine to describe for the nation the amazing benefits realized from volunteer weather reports both now and throughout U.S. history.

Spotting data that don't look right

As more and more organizations are tapping into CoCoRaHS, the occasional errors in daily reports are getting more attention. We have volunteer coordinators all over the country checking over the reports each morning. You can help too. If you notice a data entry from your area that just doesn't look right, please contact Zach Schwalbe <zach@cocorahs.org> or your state/regional volunteer coordinator. We try our best, but errors do slip through, so if you can help us spot them, please let us know.

When can I start?

We are discovering that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people who signed up for CoCoRaHS have never started reporting. If this happens to be you, it's not too late. If you need help just let us know. We can help you relocate your username and password, or you can find it yourself. Just go to <http://www.cocorahs.org> and click "Login" and then click "Find my login".

Rain Gauge Calendar photos

We can't guarantee if this will work out, but thinking ahead to our next CoCoRaHS fundraiser, we're exploring doing a 2011 CoCoRaHS Rain Gauge Calendar. That's why we are posting on the "Message of the Day" the opportunity to contribute your best photos of your rain gauge. Each season from now into the fall we'll collect seasonal shots and see if we can come up with a really classy and unique calendar that won't be like anything you've ever seen before. So if you see something that catches your attention -- from a great horned owl sitting on your gauge to masterpieces of frost and snow, take some shots and send them in to Henry Reges (hreges@atmos.colostate.edu)

1,435

That's how many "Significant Weather Reports" we've received since January 1. That's more than double what we had this time last year. Keep up the good work! Those reports are really helpful. Any time you are experiencing heavy rain, heavy snow, or other stormy weather that you think we and the National Weather Service should know about, right

away, just go to CoCoRaHS data entry and fill out a report. Your report will go nearly immediately to your National Weather Service Office.

All of us can scan the "Significant Weather reports" anytime by going to:

<http://www.cocorahs.org/ViewData/ListIntensePrecipReports.aspx>

If you go to the state drop down menu and click "Select State" at the top of the menu it will display the reports for the whole country.

Reminder: If you send in a significant weather report you still need to send in your regular daily precipitation report..

Keep on

I know the business of daily weather reporting can lose its luster, especially when not much is happening. But your reports, even those of Zero precipitation, are still really available. For some of us it's fun, for some it's a habit, but for some it feels like an annoying chore. Keep on reporting if you can. The time may come when you no longer feel like it or no longer are physically able. That's OK. We understand. Just let us know and then try to find a nearby friend or neighbor so you can still see how much moisture fell nearby.

Server failure

You may have noticed that we had our longest "CoCoRaHS system failure" today in the history of the project -- about 3.5 hours. Fortunately, the server and database were restored and we don't think we lost any data.

The horses

In closing, our horses are fine. Many of you who know the sensitive nature of equine digestive systems wrote after our horses raided our tack room and "horsed down" a sack of grain. Fortunately, they had no ill effects from their bad behavior -- but they check the latch every single day just in case I forget to close it.

I'll be back in touch in a few weeks.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University