

The Catch

COCORAHS -- LATE MAY UPDATE

FORT COLLINS, CO — Sunday, May 29, 2011

Dear CoCoRaHS participants, friends and family members,

Sorry it's been so long since I've written.

Memorial Day

I can tell by some of our conversations and some of your e-mail addresses that we have many veterans on the CoCoRaHS team. We even have a few on active and reserve duty who are finding time for reporting precipitation. Thank you all very much for your service to our nation. Some of you got your very first taste of weather observing while serving in the military.

We've lost a few of our WW2 veterans this past year but we still have some left. If you served in World War II and are still taking CoCoRaHS rainfall measurements, please send me an e-mail so we can give you some extra pats on the back.

New Recruits

A few hundred new CoCoRaHS recruits have signed up since the last time I had a chance to write. Welcome! Each and every additional rain gauge volunteer makes a difference since rainfall in our country is so incredibly variable and since rainfall affects so many things -- agriculture, water supplies, transportation, business, recreation, natural resources and so much more.

Your data reports will be appreciated. If you haven't had the opportunity yet to get your rain gauge installed, this would be a good time. If you need any help getting started, please let us know.

Floods and Drought are still about

Some of you are wishing the rain would stop and others would do anything just for a few rain clouds. Nearly half of our Montana volunteers have reported 6" or more of rain so far in May with a few reports over 10" (a lot for eastern Montana). Northern Wyoming has also been soaked. And guess what the forecast is for the rest of the weekend? No wonder so much of Montana is experiencing flood warnings and flood watches. The Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers and their tributaries will be huge for weeks to come.

As of a few days ago we still had some CoCoRaHS volunteers with snow left on the ground. Two of our stations in CA, where snowfall had been so great that it buried residential power lines, still had over 100" of snow remaining on the ground earlier this week. Here in Colorado we're waiting for the warm weather to finally arrive and when it does later this week -- look out. We have huge amounts of snow left in our mountains -- from 25 to as much as 90 inches of snow water equivalent (SWE) still up on the slopes in the northern portion of our state -- much, much more than usual. With the sun nearly overhead and the summer solstice right around the corner, the snow will be melting fast (1-2" of SWE per day when it gets warm) and the rivers surging.

Meanwhile just to our south the word of the day is still "drought" for southern Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Louisiana and parts of other southern states. I got an e-mail Friday from a faithful volunteer near Deming, New Mexico. Most places there have received less than 0.25" in the past 8 months. If you've checked the CoCoRaHS "Drought Impact Reports" there are some miserably dry conditions across these regions.

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

Your data are used every day, and I mean it

No matter how many times I repeat this, I continuously get questions about "who cares about and who uses the data from CoCoRaHS volunteers." It must be hard to fathom for some of you that backyard rain gauges have a place of importance in national climate monitoring in the 21st Century -- but it does. Let me say it one more time. Your rainfall reports -- including your reports of zero precipitation -- are being used EVERY DAY. Every morning many organizations ping our database at least every hour to get all the latest reports as they come in. When you see forecasts of river stages and flood levels on the Missouri, the Mississippi,

the Ohio, the Colorado River or most anywhere else in the country -- guess what data are helping the forecasters make these forecasts? Yes, timely CoCoRaHS data! Your reports of hail or heavy rain may trigger the NWS to issue severe thunderstorm or flash flood warnings. Your local water utility may be using CoCoRaHS data to assess local water supplies and future water demand. The US Department of Agriculture is using CoCoRaHS reports to assess drought conditions across the country. We just learned this week that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Administration) has started including CoCoRaHS winter snow reports in their determinations of snow-related disaster declarations.

These are just a few of the uses. Research, business, recreation -- you name it. Your CoCoRaHS precipitation measurements help tell an important story. We are not an "Official Federal observing network" but our data are used because precipitation is important, it varies greatly from place to place and we have a track record of proven accuracy.

Time for 10,000

We came close a year ago to having 10,000 rainfall reports (including zeros) in one day. This year I think we can do it. We're currently averaging more than 8,500 reports per day and we're occasionally spiking above 9,000.

Let's shoot for 10,000 next week. June 6-9 will be our "CoCoRaHS hits 10,000" challenge week. This will mean that some of us who forget or don't always get around to sending in our reports will need to step up to the plate to help reach the goal. Likewise, volunteers from AZ, TX, CA and other areas where the rains may have quit for now will also have to join in and report your zeros. Together we can do it. I'll send out another reminder next week.

A few other reminders

1) Comments -- Whether it's just a clear day or if you've had some wild weather, a few words in the "Comments" box really help. For example, if you've had heavy rain in the past day. Let us know roughly when it occurred and if it caused any trouble. Your comments become a part of an archive we can all use to keep track of weather history in our different areas of the country. If you're not sure what to say, just read a few comments that come each day. With a few descriptive words, we get a much clearer picture of what you are experiencing than we can infer solely from the rainfall amount.

Here's an example from this morning from a volunteer in eastern Colorado: *"Lots of thunder and sharp lightning produced little moisture. Thunder dog was trying out different hiding places but none worked- He could still see the flashes and hear the noise."*

Here's an example from Montana earlier this past week:
"Creek was still over the banks. One of these days it will go down enough to repair the road. Getting tired of walking 1/4 mile to get to the Jeep."

2) Your daily precipitation reports are the core mission of CoCoRaHS but please remember to use the several other situational report options that we offer.

"Significant Weather Reports"

You can send these at any time of day to report heavy rain, heavy snow or other significant weather events or rapid changes.

"Hail Reports"

CoCoRaHS is the only comprehensive hail data collection system in the country. Become familiar with the hail reporting form and use it every time you have hail. Check out the national hail maps from this past week (May 20-26th are particularly interesting) and you'll see how hail reports get used.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Maps/ViewMap.aspx?type=hail>

And if it didn't rain? We really appreciate it when you report your 0.00" on days when it doesn't rain, local, state and national rainfall mapping efforts all do better if our zero reports come streaming in. If you get behind sending in your zeros remember that the "Monthly Zeros" entry form makes that easy -- just by clicking a calendar.

Farm Report

We sure have appreciated the rain -- more than 4" this month. After a slow start, the pasture is looking good now. Too busy to do much early gardening this year, but we'll get going soon. As for the animals, things had settled down well for a few months. A fox stares through our fence to watch the chickens almost every day == hoping one will get adventurous and try to fly out of the yard. All the flying chickens are already gone, so the fox is a little thin this year. We had an unfortunate goose mishap this week. It is hard to fence irrigation ditches and when the irrigation canal slowed down this week our neighbor's long-legged

dog could wade over to try to meet and play with Lily (Our Australian shepherd). While Lily couldn't get out of our fence but she still managed to cheer Nala on to chase geese. One eventually succumbed to exhaustion after being playfully chased. I'll be doing more fence building to make sure that can't happen again. There's always something.

Our lilac hedge is still in full bloom -- very late this year -- but fragrant and lovely. By the way, if you enjoy observing vegetation and when things bud and bloom, I encourage you to visit the National Phenology Network website. <http://www.usanpn.org/> They would appreciate more volunteers to help in their mission.

Enjoy the Memorial Day weekend. Our fog and drizzle has ended so time to get outdoors.

Best wishes,

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