

The Catch

COCORAHS - SHORT ANSWERS TO AUGUST QUESTIONS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Friday, August 27, 2010

Dear CoCoRaHS volunteer, friends and family.

First, a warm welcome to all of you who have joined CoCoRaHS in the past month. I try to stay in touch with all volunteers at least monthly by e-mail. If you have any questions or need any help getting started, please contact the CoCoRaHS volunteer coordinator for your area, or drop us a line.

Summer winding down

In the last few days there has been a change in the air. Up until now, there have been wretched heat and humidity across much of the Plains, the Midwest, the South and the East with some areas of heavy rains popping up nearly every day. On any given day this summer, 25 to 35% of us have had rain to report. Almost every day there have been scattered pockets of very heavy rains exceeding 4 -5" while other areas have been persistently dry. Places like central Iowa, western Florida, and the mountains of southwest North Carolina have gotten huge amounts of rain. But in just the last couple of days, most of the country is drying out. It is still blazing hot in many places, but the humidity has dropped and clouds are few across the country today.. Looking at this morning's CoCoRaHS rainfall reports, it looks like today is the driest day of the whole summer across the country. Some of you may be relieved to finally dry out, but other areas could really use some rain.

As the humidity decreases and the day length shortens noticeable, we're beginning to see some very large diurnal (day to night) cycles in temperature. Yesterday up in the North Platte valley near Walden, CO (elevation around 8,000 feet above sea level) the daytime temperatures rose into the 80s but then dropped overnight down into the 20s only to rise again up to 80F today -- an impressive 60 degree swing in

temperatures. I don't think that ever happens in areas close to the coasts or down at lower elevations.

Storms have kept many parts of Colorado green this summer, but these storms have mostly bypassed our small farm. The horse corral is deep in dust and the grasshoppers are thick in the pasture. Our garden is doing OK and some tomatoes are finally beginning to ripen, but our daughter's garden next door has been largely eaten by those voracious grasshoppers. I've seen them worse, but only once or twice in the past 33 years. I think it's almost time for me to submit my first "Drought Impacts Report"

Here are some of the questions I've been asked recently. Some of these are familiar questions while others are new.

"What is a "Drought impact report" and when should I send one in?"

We added "Drought Impact Reports" to CoCoRaHS early this spring. These are optional data reports that any CoCoRaHS volunteer can submit at any time to describe unusually dry to extreme drought conditions when they occur in your area. If you happen to be in a really dry spot (compared to your average/typical precipitation patterns) it is really helpful to know the effects that lack of precipitation may be having in your area to crops, gardens, native vegetation, animals, rivers, lakes, humans etc.

"Is any day OK or is one day more important than another for sending in drought impacts reports"

You can submit a drought report at any time -- any time of day, any day of the week. They are all forwarded immediately to the National Drought Mitigation Center <http://www.drought.unl.edu/> and can be viewed on the CoCoRaHS website at:

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

If you had to choose one day of the week for submitting reports, there is a very slight preference for "Monday" based on how the data are used.

"Do I need to report my data if it did not rain in the past day?"

This is a common question. As a volunteer, you can decide this for yourself based on the time that you have. But from our side, "Zero"

precipitation is a very important piece of information. If you have time, please submit your reports even when no precipitation fell. I was delighted yesterday to see that nearly 5500 reports of "no precipitation" came in -- and there may be even more today. Also remember, at the end of the week or end of the month, you can always use the "Monthly Zeros Report" to go back and fill in the dry days that you skipped during the month.

"Do I have to have a hail pad?"

No. Hail pads are helpful but optional. However, if you do experience hail of any size, please fill out and submit a "Hail" report even if you don't have a hail pad out. Only if you send in a "Hail Report" will your hail information end up on our national hail maps.

For some reason, we're getting a lot less reports of hail this year than in previous years, but we see "hail" mentioned quite often in the Comments section of the regular daily precipitation report. So when you experience hail, take a few seconds to fill out and submit a hail report. It helps a lot.

"Has the model of the giant South Dakota hail stone that fell July 23 been finished yet?"

The Vivian, South Dakota hailstone was successfully delivered to scientists at that National Center for Atmospheric Research. We have not gotten a progress report since then on the delicate process of making a mold and creating a model. If we hear anything, we'll let you know. A few of you even asked if replicas will be available for sale. I doubt it, but I'll let you know if we hear anything.

"I check my gauge every morning, but I often don't have time to send in my report. Is it OK to send it in later in the day or even later in the week?"

Yes, it's OK to send in your reports whenever you have time, even if you don't get around to it until the next day or later that week. But that being said, it's great to get your measurements sooner than later. Reports that are received before 10 AM are most likely to be utilized that day by the National Weather Service, River Forecast Centers and others. Climatologists like myself use any and all of the reports regardless of when they are submitted.

"What should I do with my rain gauge if a hurricane is headed my direction?"

This was a darn good question that those of us "Westerners" who have never faced a hurricane had not really thought about. We are working on this with the CoCoRaHS coordinators from our Gulf and Atlantic Coast state who are much more experienced with hurricanes. We know the funnel and inner tube should be removed prior to the hurricane, but we're exploring how much wind just the outer tube and bracket can withstand.

"Have we ever hit 10,000 daily rainfall reports yet?"

No, not yet. We have well over 10,000 volunteers measuring precipitation regularly, but the most reports that we've ever had on any single day was 9,469 reports back on May 11, 2010 during a friendly challenge to see if we could hit 9,000 reports for the first time. Maybe it's time we shoot for 10,000. I'll see if September 21-23 would be a good time to shoot for this next goal.

"What were the final results of our "Five for CoCoRaHS" July fundraiser?"

We did very well thanks to people like you. We ended up with nearly \$25,000 in donations to help sustain CoCoRaHS through the summer. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Oh yes, and others asked if we are a 501c3 non-profit organization. The answer is YES -- through our Public Land Grant University.

"How's the 2011 CoCoRaHS rain gauge calendar coming along?"

Our first ever CoCoRaHS rain gauge calendar is on its way to Browntrout Publishers next week. Over 500 photographs were submitted and approximately 48 will appear in the calendar. We will shortly list those photographers whos photos were selected via our message of the day. We hope to have the calendars ready to distribute in early November, but we are still working out the details at this time. Stayed tuned. From what I've seen, the calendar looks spectacular and totally professional. We like this calendar idea so much that we're already thinking 2012. It's not too early to start taking photos for the 2012 calendar, especially autumn rain gauge scenes. We missed the fall shots for the 2011 calendar.

"How are Nolan's animals?"

They are doing OK. Angel came over for a visit this week when the gate next door was left ajar. Angel (fine specimen of a Great Pyrenees) lives next door with our son since she couldn't get along with our geese and chickens. Lily (our Australian shepherd) is a little more obedient and a little less rambunctious now. She does well as long as she gets daily attention and gets to fetch balls or herd geese or maybe go out in the pasture when I'm irrigating, to try to catch grasshoppers. The young geese are now fully grown, and the chickens are finally laying better again. Next spring we'll need some new hens. We haven't seen the big bull snake again, but we did notice a family of toads have taken up residence in our garage. That's never happened before.

"Is this letter finally over?"

Yes. We're done. Enjoy what's left of summer and keep an eye out for potential new CoCoRaHS volunteers to fill a few more gaps on our rainfall maps.

Greetings and best wishes,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University

P.S. Tomorrow will be applesauce making day, so I won't be checking email.