

The Catch

COCORAHS - A FEW SURPRISES

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, October 7, 2010

Good morning, and thanks for participating in CoCoRaHS.

For those who are new (quite a few have been signing up lately -- thanks!), CoCoRaHS is the "acronym" for the "Community, Collaborative, Rain, Hail and Snow network. We are just a lot of weather-conscience people trying our best to measure how much precipitation falls in our own neighborhoods. By sharing these measurements each day, we (you) are doing quite a remarkable job of mapping and tracking nationwide storm patterns. Your efforts are very, very much appreciated.

We try to stay in touch with everyone on a regular basis, and hence this e-mail.

We've started the new year (Water Year 2011 -- October 1, 2010 to September 30, 2011) with a few surprises.

Surprise # 1

Finally, we had a cloudy, chilly, fallish day here in northern Colorado yesterday after a long stretch of hot and very dry weather. We even had a trace of precipitation here Tuesday night after a very long stretch of zeros and an impressive evening display of lightning to the north. But still, September ended up the 7th driest on record (in the past 122 years) at our official historic weather station on the Colorado State University Campus with just 0.06" for the month and only a trace so far this month.

Surprise #2

We've had about 3 days in a row now with major outbreaks of severe weather over southern CA, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. This is not exactly the nation's severe storms alley most of the year, but every now and then things can get interesting there in the fall. This appears to be one of those infrequent episodes.

Surprise #3

Going along with #2, yesterday Phoenix, AZ was the wettest city in the U.S. for the day. That distinction is much more likely to fall on places like Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta, Tampa, or even Des Moines, but once in a rare while even Phoenix can take a turn on the top. In fact, the CoCoRaHS daily precipitation reports showed that 60 out of the 100 largest rainfall totals yesterday fell in Maricopa County (where Phoenix is). That's darn impressive. Now admittedly, 2" of rain isn't that much rain compared to what some parts of the country get, but yesterday most of the rest of the country was dry.

Over 100 rainfall reports came in from the Phoenix area yesterday -- which sounds like a lot (and it is). However, the maps were fascinating. Rainfall totals across the city ranged from over 2" at several stations down to only 0.01" in some neighborhoods. And in the parts of the city where there are few or now volunteers, we really had no idea how much rain fell. We could have easily used twice as many volunteers to more accurately depict the very complex and varied rainfall pattern that occurred. So yes, we're always looking for more volunteers.

Surprise #4

Hail

Yes, we had quite a few hail reports from CA and Arizona, including reports of up to 2" diameter hail. Thanks to those of you who submitted detailed hail reports.

Remember, you don't need to have a CoCoRaHS hail pad to report hail. We have a special report form on the website that shows up when you've selected "My Data" on the top menu of the CoCoRaHS website <http://www.cocorahs.org>. Click on that and then select "Hail" over on the upper left hand column under "Enter My New Reports". If it is hailing or has just ended, please take a minute to send in a report. Timely information on hail is very important -- even if all you got was a few small stones. Then, as soon as you've sent in your report it will show up on the various CoCoRaHS hail maps and reports and will also be automatically forwarded to your local National Weather Service forecast office.

Surprise #5

New Climate Video

One of our long-time CoCoRaHS volunteers here in Fort Collins happens to be the director of a local Cable TV channel and the Video Production Coordinator for our local School District. Their studio just produced a new show for students and teachers about some of the basics of climate. It's relatively long (about 30 minutes) and covers quite a lot of concepts really fast on energy transfer, etc. But some of you might be interested – especially those of you who are schoolteachers or are helping teach your kids (or grand kids) science at home. Here's the link:

<http://bit.ly/cDVYIK>

In the CoCoRaHS spirit of celebrating the Water Year, this local educational cable TV station has also been producing monthly or periodic "water reports" that follow our local water year in progress. You can view some previous shows here.

They have some really neat features on things like drought, snowpack, clouds, and a variety of topics. The students had a blast doing some of these shows.

Surprise #6

Angel is back

Our son took off very early this morning to a new job in the oil fields of northwest North Dakota. So Angel (a majestic Great Pyrenees) is back with us full time again. I certainly hope this doesn't bode badly for our remaining flock of chickens, but as long as everyone stays on the right side of the fences, we'll be OK. We had a goose incident on Saturday when a neighbor dog came over for an uninvited visit, but while feathers were strewn, all geese survived.

Disappointment -- no grass

Our horses are really depressed. They don't mind eating the old hay from last year, but they love a fresh green pasture to graze on -- and that's one thing we just don't have this year. After several straight months with above average temperatures, after two months of desert-like sunshine and low humidity, and after our worst grasshopper infestation in over 20 years, the pasture is bare. When I open the gate from the corral each day to let them go out exploring, they just stand there and stomp in the wretched dust. So unless we get a real soaker of an autumn rain (or wet snow) really soon, we're in for a long, dry winter.

No surprise

It's no surprise that we've received questions and suggestions about our recent 2010 Water Year Summaries. As you might expect, there were a few little glitches, but this has mostly gone really, really well. Thanks to everyone who reviewed their summaries, checked their data, filled in missing reports, etc. The results are spectacular.

Now that we have this working

1. There is no need to resubmit the water year summary to us now that we have generated them for every single station that has reported this year. If you find a discrepancy, please correct the raw daily data and don't just edit the summary report.
2. Keep in mind that when you go back and fill in missing data or correct mistakes, the summary does not automatically regenerated. We did rerun the batch this week to correct a couple of mistakes in the summary program, but now that's fixed we probably won't run it again until November 1. Then all the summaries will be updated and we'll share the national results with you shortly after.

We appreciate the many suggestions we received and will work to have better products for the next cycle of water year reports next year -- including graphs, WY reports from previous years, and a way to fill in many days of past data without having to do it one day at a time. We also hope to add "dynamic updating" so you can run the summary yourself, get immediate results and set the date ranges you prefer. Then you can do calendar year reports as well as water year, etc. And the folks in California who prefer July-June for their water year definition, can have their way too :-)

Have a great day. I'm taking the rest of the week off so I can take care of some unfinished house painting and fence building projects at home --- while the fall weather remains dandy.

Regards,

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