

The Catch

COCORAHS -- EXCITING NEWS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, December 1, 2011

Weather watchers and company,

Winter seems to be getting in full swing now -- just as you would expect for early December. With each new day, a different part of the country is getting hit by snow. Today (after a few late-autumn dry and sunny weeks) it was our turn for snow in northern Colorado. In fact, close to 700 CoCoRaHS volunteers reported measurable snowfall today from portions of about 10 different states. Tomorrow, Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas may get their chance.

For the next 4 months, snow may become commonplace, so I'll be sending out a "snow measurement refresher" in the next couple of days to describe, as best I can, how to take accurate measurements of that "white stuff".

The News -- CoCoRaHS is growing -- northward

Ever since CoCoRaHS began expanding across the U.S a few years ago, we have had occasional inquiries from other parts of the world. We chose to stay focused on the US, but then along came the incredible floods this year in the northern U.S. and across the border in Canada. You may be familiar with the Red River that flows north from the US into Canada. Flooding in recent years in Fargo and Grand Forks, North Dakota and northward to Winnipeg, Manitoba put this area in the news many times. But until this year I had never heard of the Souris River until the floods poured into Minot, North Dakota.

While there is no way that CoCoRaHS can stop floods, more and better observations of precipitation and snowpack really do help make better flood forecasts, warnings, and water management decisions. That can be worth a lot. In fact, a local flash flood is the very reason why CoCoRaHS

started here in Fort Collins back in 1998.

<http://ccc.atmos.colostate.edu/~odie/rain.html>

So when several people from Canada contacted us a few months ago, we decided this was an opportunity and a challenge that we needed to respond to. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Canadian Wheat Board, Environment Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Manitoba Water Stewardship and other provincial authorities, CoCoRaHS will begin north of the border within the next few weeks. Manitoba will be the first pilot province, likely followed by Saskatchewan. Emphasis this first year will be on getting more and better SWE (snow water equivalent) measurements from the Canadian Prairies -- where much of the flood waters this spring originated. Canada will have their own program leaders, coordinators and volunteers, with CoCoRaHS USA providing the infrastructure for gathering, displaying and sharing data. All of us will have the benefit of seeing more observations from more locations. We are honored to have our program looked upon favorably by other countries and pleased to be able to help involve local citizens as we provide a better understanding of precipitation patterns and their hydrological and agricultural significance. What will this mean for CoCoRaHS here in the USA? You will not see much change other than a couple of maple leaves on the web site and places to view Canadian maps and reports. In a few weeks we will begin seeing data points north of Minnesota and North Dakota. The addition of Canadian data points will provide valuable data for our northern states whose watersheds extend across the border. Our Canadian expansion will be the gateway to new mapping features that we have been looking forward to for several years. So join us in wishing "CoCoRaHS Canada" the best of luck as they launch this project in the middle of winter. Now that's dedication!

The 2011 Hurricane season in visual review

Thanks to a couple of you who brought to my attention the new NOAA-produced video that shows the entire 2011 hurricane season in one 4+ minute video clip. Talk about a wonderful lesson in how the atmosphere works. Take a look if you can spare a few minutes.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=fX7Q-0QuID4

The tragic "leading lady" was Irene -- and the scars from that storm are still very visible in places like New Jersey, Connecticut and especially Vermont. CoCoRaHS volunteers did an incredible job documenting the

rainfall from that huge storm, and we appreciate that very much. What I also found fascinating and disturbing was how the clouds seemed to all evaporate this year as they approached Texas. There is a great deal to be learned from watching a video like this: the nature of the giant thunderstorm complexes that sweep across the plains states; the almost daily explosion of thunderstorms on the Florida peninsula and surrounding humid southeastern states; the autumn swirls over the Great Lakes when low pressure areas stall; the plumes of moisture that sometimes surge northward from the Bay of California (Baja) up into the southern Rockies. There is a lot to see here -- and it's beautiful. I hope you take a few minutes to watch this.

A CoCoRaHS testimonial

Almost daily I hear from CoCoRaHS volunteers asking if anyone actually looks at and uses our precipitation observations. I try regularly to convince you how important our data are, but often I feel like I'm not succeeding. Today, I got an e-mail forwarded from the National Weather Service office up in Aberdeen, South Dakota. This appears to be a copy of a letter written to a CoCoRaHS observers in the area. I left out names and places to protect privacy, but this certainly tells the story.

"Hi __,

Thanks for the email. Right now we have a NWS COOP observer in __, but if you're interested we'll put you as number 1 on the list as a replacement should our current observer retire.

Having said that, whether you're an official NWS observer or a CoCoRaHS observer, we use your observation on a daily basis. In fact, you're such a reliable reporter we use your observation to supplement our climate record whenever our COOP observer is out of town. You should also know we monitored your observation very closely during the Missouri River Flooding this past spring/summer and our weather briefer at the State Emergency Operations Center often used your observation to brief state officials.

We probably don't say it often enough, but Thanks for what you do! Your observations, along with the observations of all the other CoCoRaHS observers in South Dakota have become a vital part in helping us to keep the public informed."

The moral of the story -- your CoCoRaHS observation are important -- every day!

Puppy loves the snow

Our youngest dog went crazy in the snow this morning -- running full speed for almost an hour with his nose down at grass level, powder flying in all directions. I was glad I took my snow measurement before I let the dog out because it wasn't long before there wasn't a spot in that pristine snow that hadn't been raced through and totally thrashed. Fortunately, we have the pastures and fenced garden for future measurements.

Thanks

Thanks very much for joining and sticking with CoCoRaHS. Remember, if you're new to CoCoRaHS and need help getting started please let us know. Or if you've been around for awhile but still have unanswered questions, you know where to find us -- info@cocorahs.org . And if you want to unsubscribe from these messages and avoid all this weather and rain gauge talk, just let us know.

I'll be sending two more messages yet in the next few days, so don't say I didn't warn you :-)

Good wishes to all,

Nolan Doesken