

The Catch

COCORAHS -- 2012 FULL SPEED AHEAD + SOME REMINDERS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Saturday, January 7, 2012

Saturday morning greetings,

Good morning. It is cool and dry today in Northern Colorado two days after the remarkable January heat wave where temperatures climbed into the 60s and even a few 70s all the way up into Montana and the Dakotas Thursday. Things are changing now as a storm takes shape over New Mexico (again!). Rains are developing this morning over many areas of the South. If you live in that part of the country you'll have something to measure soon. Also, there has been some cold air over Alaska the past two weeks and that may be slipping down towards the lower 48 sometime next week. We've gotten off easy so far (in most areas) but there are several weeks of deep winter that we still need to navigate.

Scant Precipitation

Did you notice how little precipitation there has been to start the new year? Based on nationwide CoCoRaHS data, the average national precipitation for the first week of January was a mere 0.10". This same week last year the national average was 0.57". The frequency and quantity of snowfall has also been really low this year over nearly all of the country.

Alaska as well as New Mexico have been noticeable exceptions. Snows continue to pile up "up north". We have about 20 loyal Alaska CoCoRaHS volunteers hard at work measuring in the cold and dark. Since December our Edna Bay observer has measured 18.53" of precipitation (mostly cold rain) and our Anchorage 11.9 SSE observer is up to 78" of snowfall for the past 5 weeks. Our Hawaiian observers have been more comfortable but their gauges have also been busy. We are up to 16 active observers in Hawaii and they are helping to prove what we've been taught about HI precipitation -- it varies like crazy from place to place. Totals since

December 1 range from less than 1" at Ewa Beach (island of Honolulu) to over 43" near Ookala on the big island of Hawaii. If we had more volunteers, I'm sure we'd see even more variations.

Thanks to the efforts of so many of you, the marvels of our climate continue to reveal themselves.

Speaking of thanks

Additional thanks to so many of you for your generous showing of support for CoCoRaHS. Just over \$30,000 in donations have been received during our "Five for CoCoRaHS" campaign. This helps the project very much. We still have a shot at reaching the goal of \$38,000 by midnight January 10th. \$5 donations don't seem like much, but with such a great group as ours, they really add up.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=2011yarend>

For those who prefer not to use the online system, instructions are shown there on where and how to send checks by mail. Again, THANKS!!

A few reminders and suggestions

1) Measuring snow

Many of you have now gone through the CoCoRaHS snow measurement training materials. The YouTube Training resources are great

<http://www.youtube.com/cocorahs/>

but this may not be a good option if you don't have high speed internet. Then I suggest you review the e-mail I sent on December 8th with the subject line "CoCoRaHS -- How to measure snow"

2) Do we need to report if it hasn't rained or snowed?

This is just a reminder of how valuable "zero" reports really are. You are volunteers and you alone know if you do or do not have the time and inclination to report on dry days, but I assure you the data are important. So if you have time, please submit your zeros.

BTW -- Yesterday (January 6) was one of the driest days in recent

CoCoRaHS history. There were only about 500 of us with any water in our gauge yesterday (close to 6,000 of us reported 0.00"!!) and the heaviest precipitation amount was 0.52 (Eagle River, Alaska). The 0.40" near Brownsville, TX was the greatest mainland U.S. amount -- and that isn't very much.

3) Significant Weather Reports

Regardless of time of year, please remember to use this CoCoRaHS data entry feature any time you experience weather conditions that you think your local weather forecasters should know about. Heavy snow, heavy rain, flooding, particularly poor visibility (fog, blowing snow, etc), extreme winds, etc are all worth reporting. It is easy to assume that the weather forecasters in your area already know what's going on, but local reports confirming adverse or changing weather conditions are worth tons. So please use this CoCORaHS report option to report significant weather -- any hour of the day. You'll find this entry report option under "My Data" and then in the menu on the left under "enter My New Reports". This menu only appears when you are logged into CoCoRaHS and not when you view the website as a non-observer.

4) What about Freezing Rain (Glaze)?

There hasn't been much yet this winter across the country, but there probably will be soon. It turns out there is very, very little quantitative data collected about freezing rain. That's where we fit in. If you observe freezing rain at your location, please report it in your daily report in the "Observation Notes" block. Try to estimate the radial thickness (not the diameter) of ice accumulating on fence wires, branches, etc. This is extremely valuable information used by forecasters, structural engineers, foresters, transportation officials and many more. We do have a training slide called "Ice Accretion" that may help.

http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=training_slideshows

5) Drought Impact Reports

Yes, even in winter, drought impacts can be subtly or visibly apparent. The extensive dry grasses of the Northern Plains (and grass fires earlier this week) are a good example. While we may know how much rain and snow have fallen from our rain gauge reports, that may or may not visibly equate to impacts. So if you are detecting local impacts from abnormal

weather conditions for your area (a drought in Phoenix looks much different than a drought in Atlanta or in Boston) please let us know using the "Drought Impact Report" data entry option. Here is some more information to help you know when and what to report.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=droughtimpactreports>

Note: This past year, with extreme drought over several southern states, it was fascinating to watch how the drier it got, the fewer drought impact reports were sent in. Maybe people just got sick of it.

6) Upcoming CoCoRaHS webinars

Our staff are getting more experienced leading "webinars". A few hundred of you attended our recent snow measurement webinars. We'll probably do one more later this winter. Now we are beginning our "WxTalk" webinar series offering one-hour classes on various weather and climate topics.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=wxtalk>

We'll generally have about one a month and cover a wide range of topics from clouds to lightening, tornadoes and hurricanes. Since we have quite a few young and budding "future meteorologists" in our ranks, we're also planning to do one on "how to become a meteorologist".

The schedule for 2012 is just starting to take shape. Check back every few weeks. We will increase webinar registration from a maximum of 100 participants to 500 later this spring to accommodate many more attendees.

7) Water 2012

This is a Colorado celebration but you're all welcome to join in no matter where you live as we celebrate the importance of water throughout the coming year. Our Governor will make the proclamation at the upcoming 2012 Water Congress in Denver later this month. We'll be encouraging every school in Colorado to get involved as we all realize that "the weather is our water supply" and our gauges tell us how much we've got.

Here's a link to see what is and will be happening as this year-long celebration unfolds. <http://www.water2012.org/>

And finally, the farm

Chinook winds last weekend removed our remaining snowcover and broke off a few more branches. I'll need to get the chain saw out one more time to finish cleaning up. The chickens are now laying a few eggs each day (had a delicious quiche for breakfast this AM). The horses are fairly happy -- although they went bonkers during the windstorm last Saturday.

The geese are starting to get revved up for their egg-laying season which starts in a few weeks. For the most part, things are peaceful here but we still see a fox now and then peaking out of the irrigation ditch waiting for an "adventure chicken" to escape. I think all the "adventure chickens" have already become dinner.

In conclusion

You may not hear from me for a few weeks as the new year gets really busy. But if you happen to be in New Orleans on Sunday, January 22, CoCoRaHS will be a part of the "American Meteorological Society" annual meeting and annual public "WeatherFest". We'll have a CoCoRaHS display there and a rain gauge competition for kids and adults from noon to 4 PM. Please come by and say "Hi".

Then on Wednesday, January 25th we'll be at the Colorado Farm Show in Greeley.

The following week we will be sharing "CoCoRaHS" with the National Association of Conservation Districts -- an organization that inherently cares about precipitation and whose members cover the entire country. If you're a member of the NACD, hope to see you there.

Sincerely hoping for a good weather year,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University