

The Catch

COCORAHS -- IS YOUR RAIN GAUGE READY?

Fort Collins, CO —Wednesday, March 6, 2013

Dear CoCoRaHS Rain Gauge watchers:

It has been too many weeks since I've had a chance to write -- our ongoing drought here in Colorado (but lessening a bit now with several recent storms and another likely storm on tap for this weekend) has required the focus of my attention. But now it's March -- a time of lively weather across many areas of the country.

Diligent weather reporting always matters, but now it gets keenly important. Severe weather season starts now from Texas into the Midwest and begins its springtime spread across the country. Meanwhile, snow is still a big deal from the Rockies to Mid Atlantic and New England states -- (great to see the snow in the DC area today). This is the time of year that the old weather folklore states, "as the days grow longer, the storms grow stronger" and there is truth to that. Spring precipitation makes a huge difference in how we start the new growing season. Last year, March set the tone for a year of widespread drought. Hopefully, this year will be different and so far it seems like it.

Today I have a number of reminders and updates to share. But first, a welcome to those of you who are new to our project -- the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CoCoRaHS). We are very glad to have so many fellow weather watchers and precipitation measurers on our team. Each point on the map helps to more accurately track storms and lack of storms across our large continent. Your participation is appreciated -- a lot!!!

Remember, if you are new to CoCoRaHS, just getting started, and/or have questions, we're all here to help.

Special CoCoRaHS WeatherTalk Webinar Announcement

Are you interested in how and why we monitor drought and why it matters so much? Mark Svoboda with the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska is our guest this week -- an expert on drought nationally and globally, drought planning and response.

The webinar will begin this Thursday (tomorrow, March 7) at 11 AM MST (That's 1 PM eastern, noon central and 10 AM Pacific time)

Register here: <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/795472758>

All of our previous CoCoRaHS Webinars are archived and available for viewing, so if you miss it you can watch it later.

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDDC91E3A979406CE>

March Madness

Our annual nationwide competition to see which state can recruit the most new volunteers is underway. So far, North Carolina is leading the overall competition but with Wyoming with a strong lead in the "per capita" division. Maine has also done quite well in the first few days of competition.

We can all help. If each of us recruits just one new volunteer this month to help with CoCoRaHS, what a huge help that would be. Just click the "Join CoCoRaHS" button on the www.cocorahs.org website, and we'll be on our way to weather watching satisfaction.

March 1960

Speaking of March Madness, I've been thinking recently back to March 1960 -- a year that helped shape my interests in weather and climate as I grew up in east central Illinois. It was the first year that I remember watching the state basketball tournament -- Marshall High School from Chicago won. But what I really remember is snow -- piles of it -- and snow storms every week, usually on Wednesday and often cancelling Lenten services in our farming community. It seemed like winter would never end -- and I loved it. It was flat in our area (really flat!), so sledding was not feasible unless someone towed you with ropes behind a car, but I distinctly recall the giant (from my 8-year-old perspective) snow piles at the south end of the church parking lot -- and using a large grain scoop as a sled to slide down the piles. That was true rural Illinois

joy for me. By that age, I got so excited by snow that I was unable to sleep at night if a storm was predicted. I would keep getting up to look outside to see "*has the snow started yet*"? My parents probably wondered "*what have we done?*" but they never discouraged my curiosity, and it just kept growing from there.

I'm probably not the only CoCoRaHS volunteer who remembers March 1960. I think some of those storms made it all the way to the Carolinas. If you have any stories from that wintery month that you need to share, I'd be delighted to hear them.

Since I last wrote:

The weather never stops and our rain gauge reports help tell the story. After a very easy winter last year, the pace has picked up. We've had several big storms including "Nemo" the New England blizzard in February, a whopping blizzard from Amarillo to Wichita, the recent storm that came out of the Canadian prairies and is still snowing today in Virginia and Maryland -- and several others.

By the way, did you notice the rains in Hawaii? We have a great group of volunteers there -- most on the "Big Island" -- and they've been very busy lately. It's dried out recently, but February was a lively month. Our CoCoRaHS volunteer near Honomu was the "winner" with 41.36" of rain for the month. Several other sites on the east side of the island of Hawaii had over 30" while, as usual, the dry west side only got sprinkled on.

Saskatchewan

After being on hold for a year, the "CoCoRaHS Canada" expansion has begun. Saskatchewan is now on the team along with Manitoba. More provinces may join in the next year. If you have cousins up north in Saskatchewan, encourage them to join.

We've also turned on the switch so volunteers in Nebraska can now participate either through CoCoRaHS or through NeRAIN (get it -- "*Any Rain*" -- the Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network). We helped launch NeRAIN back in 2004 and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources has done a great job with it ever since.

<http://nerain.dnr.ne.gov/nerain/>

Significant Weather Reports

You probably get sick of hearing this, but I'm going to repeat it anyway. Please familiarize yourself with the report form "Significant Weather Reports" and make use of it whenever you are experiencing "heavy weather" -- be it the onset of snow, rapid accumulations, heavy rain, high winds, etc.

So many people ask, "How do I know if it's "Significant" and don't the meteorologists already know from their radar?" Put yourself in a weather forecaster's shoes. They may be watching storm systems on radar and have a good idea where storms are, but knowing with confidence what's happening on the ground is another matter and incredibly important. That's where we come in. When did the snow start? How rapidly is it accumulating now? When did it end? When did the heavy rain begin? How much has accumulated so far today? Yes, our daily reports of total precipitation are key -- your Sig. Wx. Report is not a substitute for your regularly daily precipitation report -- but these additional reports which are directed automatically to your National Weather Service forecast office can really be important for weather forecasts, severe weather warnings and storm verification.

Here is a link to view "Significant Weather Reports"

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

Drought 2013?

We've been watching and celebrating improvements in the Plains drought conditions over the past few weeks. More improvements are in store -- but then what? As we warm up in spring, evaporation rates increase and soils can dry more quickly. Practically every year some part of the country develops drought. Where will it be this year? Drought.gov is a great website for tracking changes in drought conditions. And your rain gauge reports help, too.

Snow Measurement challenges

Winter is winding down, but we are still getting questions every day about how to measure snow. Remember we have a whole array of training materials at www.cocorahs.org -- videos, animations, slide shows, webinars.

There is still confusion on what we mean by new snowfall and total snow

depth. Snowfall is the accumulation of new snow (prior to melting and settling) that occurs within 24 hours. Snow depth (and this is really an important measurement that often gets ignored) is the average depth of both old and new snow on the ground at the time of your daily observations. Snow depth should be reported even on days when no new snow has fallen. For some of us, this seems like a very difficult measurement to make based on our instructional materials, but it's really not so hard once you have a little practice. Get a good measurement after a fresh snow and then you can almost visually watch the snow compress and decrease in subsequent days without having to take many measurements.

Measuring snowfall and total depth during and after true blizzards is not easy. You simply will not know for sure how much snow fell. Your reasonable estimate (and some comments describing your observations) will be the best you can do.

One more snow training animation

It has taken longer than we hoped, but we are wrapping up a special animation that addresses all the hardest parts of snow measurement in a humorous way -- blizzards, freezing rain, etc. Hopefully we'll have it posted before winter is over :-)

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS0EU9SKRY0_liw4Z60q_zodgCz-etYB5

What is phenology?

Spring is approaching. We saw our first glimpse of crocuses a few days ago during a recent warm spell here in Colorado. For all you gardeners and plant and animal watchers, there is a field of study known as phenology which is the study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events and how these are influenced by seasonal and inter-annual variations in climate. If this fascinates you, your observations from your own yard or your community are of great interest to other scientists. Here is where you can go to help.

https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook

Drop me a quick e-mail if you currently participate in phenology observations or plan to. I'm curious how many of us do this. I watch our plants every year, and I even have a few of the NPN cloned lilacs here on our property. But I have trouble remembering to write things down and send in my reports. I need to get better.

Speaking of the farm

It has been fairly calm on the farm this winter. The puppies all have good homes now. We've got quite a few goose eggs this year and have been able to sell most of them. The horses have had a good winter although the winter dust was really getting annoying. Thankfully, the recent snows have been enough to settle the dust without making a scene of mud. The chickens have (had) been laying well until a little crisis yesterday. A neighbor needed help after having a tire blow out on his truck just down the street from us. We rushed to finish the chores and somehow left the chicken yard door ajar. Our most curious Australian shepherd, Lily, was the first (as always) to notice our mistake and while we were gone gathered the other dogs and raided the chicken coop. Feathers were everywhere when I got back, and I feared the worst -- but upon taking inventory all chickens and the rooster were accounted for -- traumatized and somewhat bald, but alive. Fortunately, the dogs just licked the chickens and never sunk their teeth in.

Finally

Do your best with what March has to offer this year, and thanks again for all your help. We'll be feeling a bit older this year as our youngest of two children turns 25 on the first day of Spring. Life goes on.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University