

# The Catch

## COCORAHS -- WHOSE TURN FOR RAIN?

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, April 24, 2012

Dear rain trackers, weather enthusiasts, friends and family,

A warm welcome to all of you who are new or recent additions to the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CoCoRaHS) and a big thanks to all of you (thousands now) who have been with CoCoRaHS for a year or longer. While many of you are newer to CoCoRaHS, we have many veterans who have reported at least 1000 times and a few volunteers here in Colorado who are getting close to their 5,000 the daily report since the project first started back in 1998 (the year after our bad flood in Fort Collins).

Whether you are an active rain checker, a former rain checker, a "planning to set up my gauge real soon" person, or just "thinking about it", we're glad you're here.

Today I want to tell you about our recent and upcoming training webinars and then answer a few questions that have been coming up almost every day. But first a quick "weather report".

### **Recent and future rains -- whose turn is it?**

Week by week, we've continued to see welcome and sometimes heavy rains across TX, OK, LA and other areas hit so hard by the big southern drought last year. This has been great news for these areas. But meanwhile many other areas have been drying out. Thanks for remembering to use the CoCoRaHS "Drought Impact Reports" to report conditions in your area. That information helps more than you may realize.

It was great to finally see the East take a good soaking the past few days. It's been a long time since there was such a widespread storm there --

and even snow in some areas. New Jersey has the most CoCoRaHS rain gauges per square mile than any state -- with the gauges spread nicely across their entire state. This recent storm dropped nearly 2.50" -- and remarkably uniform across the state. From FL to the northern tip of Maine, beneficial rains finally fell. Thanks so much for helping track this for us.

Meanwhile on our side of the country, it's a different story. Here in northern Colorado this is normally our spring wet season. But this year it's looked more like southern New Mexico with daily sunshine, very warm temperatures (80s predicted for today), no snow (March and April are often our snowiest months of the year but not this year) -- darn good cactus weather. But if this keeps up just a few more weeks we'll be in serious trouble. As the "State Climatologist" for Colorado I'm running from one "water meeting" to the next keeping water officials informed of our deteriorating drought conditions. This is not much fun.

But there's good news. Rain is finally in the forecast for our area for later this week -- and we need it so much! Also, rain is predicted for much of the Mississippi and Missouri River Basins and across the northern half or 2/3 of the country for the next one - two weeks. That would be good.

So keep your rain gauge clean and ready! If you like to keep tabs of the long-range forecasts, here is a useful link.

<http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>

### **Speaking of clean, what about "birds"?**

Spring seems to be the time of year when the most birds in the most places decide to sit on our lovely rain gauges and leave small gifts. This is extremely frustrating for some of us. A couple years ago we collected suggestions from across the country on how to deal with this. Suggestions ranged from bb guns (not recommended -- as holes in rain gauges are never a good thing) and rubber snakes, to sticky substances, wind mills, shiny streamers, noise makers and "bird wires". Overall, I think the bird wires have been the most successful for the most people -- just a few thin but rigid wires sticking up at least 2-3" around the outside rim of your gauge -- held in place by a couple of thick rubber bands and bent slightly outward so as not to interfere with the collection of rain. If you have a better idea that has proved to be successful, please let me know.

## **Lightning!**

Yes, it is that time of year. We've had a few rumbles of thunder here but there will be plenty more in the months ahead -- hopefully. I was fascinated by lightning from the time I was a preschooler -- and it is one of the most widespread weather hazards we deal with across the country.

Next week, Ron Holle -- who has been studying lightning most of his long and impactful scientific career -- will be our guest for a special webinar on lightning and how to stay safe. Please sign up if you have time for this one-hour presentation next week (May 3) at 11 AM Mountain Time.

Just click here to register.

<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/736311742>

To see the schedule of other upcoming weather seminars, see our WxTalk webpages <http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=wxtalk>

We archive each webinar so you can view them at any time. Matt Kelch's "Flash Flood" webinar was incredible and I highly recommend checking it out.

To kick off the 2012 hurricane season, our guest will be Chris Landsea with the National Hurricane Center. I hope you can join us for that one.

## **How to use the CoCoRaHS Website?**

Nearly 300 attended Zach's informative webinar on the basics of using the CoCoRaHS website -- everything from how to log in, entering precipitation reports, editing data, viewing maps, etc etc. We also had many, many questions -- plus a lot of disappointed volunteers who were unable to attend. The good news is we just posted the class so anyone with moderately high speed internet and a compatible browser can view it. Here's the link.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPtIHBI9g4U&feature=youtu.be>

## **Do I need to report to CoCoRaHS when it doesn't rain?**

We get this question all the time. The answer is: You are a volunteer. You know how much time you can spare. If you can spare the extra minute it takes to report your 0.00", we really appreciate it a lot. Zero is a valid and important reading that confirms that you received no precipitation.

We realize that it is not particularly satisfying to report "no precipitation" but it makes your precipitation records more valuable. If you can, please do report your zeros. And remember, we have a special report form (nicely described in Zach's webinar) called the "Monthly Zeros report" where you can go back to view a full month at a time on a calendar view and see your reports -- and then just click on each day when you had no precipitation in your gauge that morning.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/MonthlyZerosReport.aspx>

### **What does my station number and name mean?**

This is another common question. When we sign up for CoCoRaHS we are immediately and automatically issued a CoCoRaHS station number. It looks something like this CO-LR-273 (that's mine). The first two letters are obviously your state abbreviation. Then comes a dash. The second two letters (three in some states with large numbers of counties) are an abbreviation for the name of your county. Then comes another dash (-). Finally, there is a number. This is simply a sequence number. If you happened to get "1" then you were the very first person to sign up in your county. We get really excited every time we see a #1 -- as we continue to try to fill in every county of the country. We still have a few hundred counties to go, but we did have a #1 from Grant County, Arkansas, join CoCoRaHS just yesterday. Here in Larimer County, Colorado, we are already in the 900s and could reach 1000 later this year or next. That's a lot of volunteers for one county, but we appreciate each and every one. We now have a number of counties across the country with over 100 registered CoCoRaHS volunteers. That is worth celebrating.

Then, a day or two later you received an e-mail with a letter than contained your assigned "station name". The name will look like this "My town 3.7NNE" or something like that. This name is supposed to represent your distance (in miles and tenths) and direction from the center of the nearest known city or town. A station name "Littletown 1.8 SE" should represent a position 1.8 miles SE of the middle of Littletown.

Not all of you were pleased with the name we assigned your station as it may not have agreed with how you identify your location. Our computer system assigns three potential names to each new station based on the latitude and longitude coordinates on a list of "naming points" that we were given several years ago by the National Weather Service. As some of you have noticed, some of these locations seem odd. More than likely there were some errors on the list. The "middle of town" is not always in the "middle of town" for example. Likewise, it is possible that you

were named relative to a town that isn't really the nearest town. But not every town was on the NWS list. So we did our best. The names are not that important -- as long as we get your latitude and longitude correct on our maps. But the names come in handy when quickly scanning reports. They are particularly important on your hail and significant weather reports that go to the National Weather Service.

### **A very dusty, old farm -- with an old dog**

Our fruit trees have already blossomed, our trees are nearly in full leaf, the grass turned green but then brown again and is not growing. There is so much dust -- but the chickens seem to like that. Our well is dry until the irrigation ditch begins to flow -- and that's not usually until mid May. This year it may not flow much at all since there is so little snow in our mountains. To keep our compost piles going (we do a lot of composting) we've had to use our regular tap water -- so our water bill is going to be high. Unless things change fast, there won't be much irrigation water. I filed my first drought impact report a few days ago to describe the early dryness we're experiencing. I see that some of our nearby counties have "Red Flag Warnings" in place for today. I don't care much for such dryness -- not this time of year. The Weather Service just downgraded our chances of thunderstorms on Thursday from 40% to 30% but at least that's better than "mostly sunny". Also, the temperature should be back into the 60s instead of the 80s -- so that will put less stress on the vegetation. Neighbors are already planting beans and tomatoes, even though history has shown that's not a good idea here until at least the middle of May. We'll see how this all works.

Our Angel (our aging Great Pyrenees) has had some rough days of late. Her attitude towards life is great, but her hips are just about shot. Most of last week I had to pick her up (all 100 pounds) to get her moving. We really didn't have the time, but we took the time anyway to spend an hour or two on both Saturday and Sunday just to bathe and groom her -- knowing that the time was coming soon to make a hard decision. But somehow that extra love seems to have paid off. Today she's up and around again roaming the perimeter and letting out those marvelous deep "Woofs". We'll hopefully be able to enjoy a few more weeks or months together.

### **In conclusion**

Please enjoy spring -- whatever it may bring you. We just don't know how many we will get.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken