

The Catch

COCORAHS -- GOOD NEWS AND HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Fort Collins, CO — Wednesday, November 21, 2012

Greetings

Read on to see some very good news we have to share.

Here on the morning before Thanksgiving, I want to let you know how thankful we are for having so many wonderful volunteers like you all across the U.S. and Manitoba, Canada who find the time each day to go out and check the rain gauge. That may sound odd and trivial to many people around us who aren't as interested in weather and climate as we are. But we know that our collective efforts are making it possible to map and track our precipitation (or lack of it) from sea to shining sea. That is a really big deal, and we thank you for your help.

Recruit a future CoCoRaHS volunteer at dinner :-)

Enjoy Thanksgiving -- and if you happen to find yourself sitting across the table from someone who takes an interest in talking about how much rain and snow you've measured this year, perhaps this will be a good recruiting opportunity (I'm joking, but only halfway). While others are gathered around the TV watching football, you could show them the CoCoRaHS website and help them get signed up.

My wife and I don't have any big plans for the holiday. Our children and other relatives are far away again this year. But we have nearby friends with 5 young children who have adopted us into their family this year. We'll be bringing the turkey -- just hope it thaws in time :-)

Some big rains

I happened to be in Oregon for climate meetings last week. Enjoyed a

couple of beautiful sunny days in the Portland–Salem–Corvallis area. As we left last Thursday the forecast was "heavy rain ahead". The predicted rains materialized and rainfall totals since then have been large. Dozens of Oregon and Washington CoCoRaHS volunteers have had over 6" of rain since then with some totals up over one foot of rain down in SW Oregon near Brookings.

For most of the country, dry weather continues. I'll enjoy working outdoors this weekend, but we could really use a foot of wet snow – and soon.

Some exciting news (at least for us precipitation geeks)

Here is our good news we want to share.

1) For years we've been trying to improve, shorten and simplify our instructions on how to measure snow. Instead of reading my typical 11 pages of my tedious step by step e-mail instructions, enjoy these short and very descriptive snow training videos.

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

Many of you have been measuring snow for years now and are quite skillful and experienced, but if you are new to CoCoRaHS or just want to make sure you are doing it right, please view and enjoy these fun animations.

We also have other very good but longer traditional training materials on how to measure snow.

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

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

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWbbj57fOcA&list=PL86DC4C330F518387&index=5&feature=plpp_video

Before you face your first or next snow, please take time to review training materials. There are very few sources for snow data in the country, so many professionals turn to CoCoRaHS to track snowfall amounts, snow depth and water content. If you have any questions, please let us know.

2) Precipitation averages and histories -- the PRISM -- CoCoRaHS Climate Portal -- Hurray!!!

This has been a long time coming and represents many decades of data collection by the National Weather Service's remarkable 120+ year-old "Cooperative Weather Observer" program. The PRISM Climate Group at Oregon State University has been working nearly 20 years to develop and improve methods of analyzing and displaying climate data geospatially.

Thanks to a partnership, with PRISM, we are very pleased to announce the "PRISM-CoCoRaHS Climate Portal". This is a precipitation data analysis tool that is only available to CoCoRaHS participants. There are no public links at this time. It is a small gesture on our part to thank you for your efforts to contribute rainfall data. This portal helps us connect our daily precipitation measurements (weather) to the seasonal patterns, long term averages and year to year variations that we experience over time (climate).

This portal provides access to estimates of "normal" precipitation for any location in the contiguous United States -- using the 1981-2010 base period for evaluation. PRISM also provides estimates of total precipitation for each month and year since 1895. View the PRISM Portal Reference page at:

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

You can access the portal by going to the CoCoRaHS home page and clicking on "My Account" at the top of the page. You will need to be logged in to your account. From there you have two choices. One is to select the PRISM Portal section and click on the "blue" words PRISM PORTAL to get access to the Continental United States or under the My Station heading click on the "blue" words PRISM DATA to get access to your specific station's PRISM data.

Once there you'll be able to find the estimated precipitation for any location in the continental United States or create a historical time series for monthly and annual precipitation. This is nothing short of fantastic for analyzing and comparing precipitation all across the lower 48 (our apologies to Alaska, Hawaii and Canada -- eventually that will work too, but not this year).

We recommend watching the short YouTube instructional video on how to use the portal:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZgXgVlbfMo&list=PL86DC4C330F518387&index=1&feature=plpp_video

Please enjoy and use this great new feature. Remember, models are not perfect and there are parts of our country where historic data are sparse. Mountains, coasts and steep terrain are areas where long-term average precipitation differs greatly over short distances -- so these are areas where you may see some differences.

Keep in mind that as time goes on, more and more CoCoRaHS data will be used to improve the PRISM estimates for future generations. Once again, this is a prime example of CoCoRaHS at work.

The Dust Bowl

I'm guessing that many of us watched this program earlier this week. We hoped to as we have direct connections and many family stories. My wife's mother (now deceased) was 12 years old out on the eastern plains of Colorado in 1934 when the worst of the dust storms swept across that area. It was her job to scan the sky and get the animals in the barn before each huge cloud of dust swept over. By the time she was 14 her parents made arrangements for her to move to Denver for better schooling and more opportunities. Several of her eight brothers and sisters left the homestead, too.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to see the TV series but I did get to speak Monday evening to the annual meeting of one of our Conservation Districts -- organizations established after the Dust Bowl to encourage wiser use of land and resources. It was great to be with some of the stewards of the land -- even as we all face drought here yet again.

Wishing you and your family a Happy Thanksgiving. Thanks again for being a part of CoCoRaHS.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University