

The Catch

COCORAHS -- SOME REFLECTIONS

Fort Collins, CO — Monday, December 31, 2012

Dear CoCoRaHS Rain Gauger (and snow, too)

Another year comes to an end today. What lies ahead for next year none of us know. Perhaps this is a good time to reflect and, as best we can, give thanks.

It has been 15 years since the flash flood here in Fort Collins (July 28, 1997) was the destructive impetus to start a volunteer rain gauge network. We still have at least a dozen volunteers who have been with the project since our first day in 1998. If any of you still are using your original 1998 rain gauge, send me a picture.

Since then it has been amazing to watch CoCoRaHS grow and spread. "Rain gauge champions" have emerged in every state -- State Climate offices, National Weather Service meteorologists, and other weather/water professionals -- to help recruit and lead "citizen scientists" like you. This year we added several dozen new volunteers in Manitoba, CA.

Here are some statistics for 2012

3,600,000 daily precipitation reports submitted this year (We finally reached our goal of more than 10,000 reports per day and even exceeded 11,000 reports per day on several occurrences)

18,000,000 since the project began (approx)

6,000 Significant Weather Reports

530,000 Daily Comments

50,000 Multiday Precipitation reports

1,561 Drought Impact Reports

11,484 Daily Evapotranspiration Reports

3,043 Hail Reports

There are just too many individual highlights for this year to recount, but some of us came face to face with drought, dust storms, wildfire, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, blizzards (but not too many this year) and everything in between. On 14 separate days in 2012 at least one of us woke up to find the rain gauge filled or nearly filled to the top (the gauge holds just over 11.00" -- a whole lot of rain.)The all-time record for CoCoRaHS occurred in June 10th when one of our volunteers in Escambia County, FL (near Pensacola) accurately measured 21.70" of rainfall in 24 hours (Wow!!!!)

The fragile human side of CoCoRaHS

CoCoRaHS is precipitation in our plastic rain gauges, but it is so much more than that. It is also people and our stories. We have good days and bad. Several of you contacted me or had family members contact me to let me know about medical conditions, accidents, etc. that sidelined some of you this year. We have our first days (some of our volunteers welcomed new children, grand children and great grand children into their families this year) but also our last days. I am never quite prepared for this but almost every month I get an "I am sorry to report - - - " e-mail from a friend or family member of a recently deceased member. This brings sadness, but I am so grateful that people take the time to tell us. Earlier this month we heard of the unexpected passing of one of our long-time volunteers near Wilmington, DE. A few weeks earlier news came of the loss of one of our extremely active volunteers in Hunterdon County, NJ and a fantastic weather enthusiast in Rhode Island. I know this is inevitable but all of us, but that doesn't make it easy.

There were also joyous e-mails of small and large victories as some of us overcame challenges and recovered from setbacks this year. Thanks for sharing your good news, too.

One story that I need to share is the story of Cynthia. She joined CoCoRaHS over 10 years ago in Colorado. She was in her 40s at the time. Despite dealing with mental illness and the impacts of medications, joint ailments and eventually the dreaded diagnosis of stage-4 breast cancer several years ago, Cynthia loved watching and learning about the weather. She first lived in a small 2nd floor apartment in a large urban complex on the west side of Denver. She tried to set up a rain gauge there but it was stolen. Then she mounted one on a boom extending out from her balcony. Her landlord was not pleased, so that ended. Nevertheless, she helped her CoCoRaHS county coordinator with recruiting efforts and training sessions. She was eventually able to afford a small

house in southern Colorado (Pueblo) and finally had a good place for a gauge. She watched everything "nature" even in an urban environment -- the birds, the butterflies, the rainbows and NWS radar. She had a keen sense of smell that aided her weather observations. She became an NWS severe weather spotter, and trained to be a Master Gardener. She was unable to drive, but still made it to many meetings by bus or her tricycle. Despite being shy, she gathered her strength and volunteered to help the National Weather Service staff their booth at the Colorado State Fair -- encouraging visitors to consider setting up a CoCoRaHS rain gauge. Even as she dealt with a discouraging cancer diagnosis and dwindling strength, she continued to volunteer for CoCoRaHS in very, very significant ways. For several years she reviewed each day's CoCoRaHS observation notes (more than 1000 a day) <http://www.cocorahs.org/ViewData/ListDailyComments.aspx> and then compiled a report for us each day including data quality issues, critical storm information, unique reports, observers needing assistance, and sometimes just plain funny comments (we have a few poets and humorists in our ranks, fyi). Despite having very limited financial means, she donated a new laptop computer to CoCoRaHS back when we were first getting started. Overall, she gave hundreds of hours of her time to quietly and humbly "be of assistance" even as she had few friends and no family to help her in her hours of greatest need.

Cynthia departed this life in mid November. We miss her greatly -- her wit, her wry humor, her perceptive insights, her love for all animals and her amazing and unexpected support of our community of weather watchers.

Funds and Finances

We all have our issues here -- at home, at work, and at our favorite charities. Like everything else, CoCoRaHS doesn't "just happen". We have a small but skilled and enthusiastic staff that makes the whole program tick. We currently receive support from NOAA and the National Science Foundation for the educational goals of this project. In Colorado, several water utilities provide annual support to maintain ongoing data collection. But donations are especially important as we work to sustain CoCoRaHS.

Last year we received nearly \$38,000 from our 2011 year end "Five for CoCoRaHS" fundraiser. Donations helped support 2012 Web development, new features and updates such as the great new training materials and animations <http://www.youtube.com/cocorahs/> As of Friday, we're up to \$21,000 in our 2012 fund raiser.

Your help is needed and greatly appreciated
<http://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=2012yearend>

And for all who have already shared -- either by helping with rain gauge observations, helping with financial support, or both -- Thanks SO MUCH!

Goals for 2013

We have many -- I-phone apps, more mapping features (like maps showing accumulated precipitation totals for periods of interest), more great Webinars. But there is another goal you can help with. We still have hundreds of counties across the U.S. where we have NO rain gauges. Imagine what our maps would look like <http://www.cocorahs.org/Maps/> if we had at least one data point in every county.

Take a look at the maps. In some cases we have registered volunteers but they haven't started reporting yet. If you are one of the only volunteers in your county, please send in reports as often as you can. In other cases, we just need to do some recruiting. Let's come at this from a number of directions (friends, family, newspapers, TV, National Weather Service) and see if we can fill in these blanks. I believe we added about 70 new counties in 2012. We still have hundreds more to go scattered about the country. Ready, set -- GO!

Snow and its' challenges

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Peter, our "CoCoRaHS data checker" has been working overtime during these recent snow storms to help correct snow reports. It's been great seeing our many new observers in places like Arkansas and Oklahoma get a chance to measure some snow.

If you are uncertain about how to measure and report snow, please make use of our online training materials or just send your question to your volunteer coordinator for your area. Another option is just e-mail us at info@cocorahs.org with your questions.

As you submit a report, remember it is OK to type in NA (not available) for any of the measurement fields if you were unable to measure it or are not sure you are doing it right. Then you can go back and fill it in later after you get your question answered.

Happy New Year

For those of you who are CoCoRaHS veterans, thanks for sticking with us for another year. And for the +5000 who joined in 2012, we're delighted to have you. Our staff here at the Colorado Climate Center wishes everyone a Happy New Year. May the drought conditions improve, the floods be averted, the hail be soft and infrequent, and the snow fall gently with no wind (and melt on the roads and sidewalks). And since there will be exceptions to our wishes, thanks for helping measure and report what actually does happen in 2013. Have a wonderful new year.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken and the whole team.
Colorado State University