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The Catch



NOLAN DOESKEN'S BI-MONTHLY COCORAHS E-MAIL MESSAGE

CoCoRaHS -- The What House?

Fort Collins, Colorado -- March 24th, 2015

Many parts of the country are warming up, and grass is turning green. It's still wintry in New England and the northern Great Lakes, but the snow is slowly retreating (finally). Much of Texas has been getting rain and much of California has not. As a new growing season arrives, how is your part of the country doing -- too wet, too dry, or just right?

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Welcome

Many new volunteers, hundreds in fact, have signed up to help measure and report rainfall already this month. If you are one of the “newbies”, welcome to CoCoRaHS and hope you’re making good progress getting your rain gauge set up. Expect to get an e-mail like this about once a month and read it when you have time. Occasionally there are some useful tidbits and weather-watching encouragement. If you have any questions or need any help getting started, just let us know or contact the [CoCoRaHS volunteer coordinator for your area](#).

What is CoCoRaHS? And Why?

Our funny name – CoCoRaHS – is just an acronym. When we first started our backyard

rain gauge project it stood for “Colorado Collaborative Rain and Hail Study.” But after we expanded to more states and added snow to our measurements, we adjusted the name to “Community Collaborative, Rain, Hail and Snow network.

Why are backyard plastic rain gauges useful in this 'techy' time in world history?

Honestly, it's because precipitation is really, really important (water supply, agriculture, forestry, transportation, commerce, recreation, and so much more). It varies a ton from day to day, year to year and place to place. It affects what we do, where we do it and how much we enjoy it. There are more and more sources of electronic measurements of precipitation and estimates by remote sensors -- from [satellites in space](#) as well as from [ground-based weather radar](#). Technology is awesome, don't get me wrong -- but dollar for dollar, the CoCoRaHS-recommended manual rain gauge, properly placed and installed (and reported by an interested and observant volunteer), provides the most accurate measurement of rain, hail and snow. In fact, CoCoRaHS - along with [Cooperative Observers](#) and [SKYWARN Storm Spotters](#) for the National Weather Service - account for almost all the measurements we have for snow and hail.

Our measurements are used for weather, water supply and flood forecasts, for assessing drought severity and impacts, for severe storm prediction and verification, for crop growth and yield forecasts, for assessing hail damage, for contracting snow removal, for predicting mosquito outbreaks, for planning fishing and snowmobiling outings, and plenty more. Furthermore, the people who are using radar and satellite to estimate precipitation, snow cover, etc. are big fans of CoCoRaHS as they use our data to calibrate and validate their products.

So it may just look like a piece of plastic and feel a bit low tech for this day and age, but our CoCoRaHS measurements are really important and incredibly useful. Thanks so much for participating. We hope your gauges are installed and ready as we prepare for the 2015 thunderstorm season – the time of year when the precipitation varies the most of all.

The *What* House?



This past week I received a most unexpected phone call. Someone from the White House in Washington, D.C. called to invite me to the 2015 White House Science Fair. Why me == Why us? Turns out that the [Office of Science and Technology Policy](#) in DC, had heard about CoCoRaHS and thought it was time the White House join our project. Over the past few years, the field of “Citizen Science” (which is how they describe us CoCoRaisins) has grown steadily, and practitioners have even [formed an association](#). With [over 1000 projects](#) to choose from, CoCoRaHS seemed like a good, practical project that White House staff could help with. They have a great location for

the rain gauge in the White House kitchen garden (visible to the public on the South Lawn, but probably only CoCoRaHS volunteers would notice). The National Park Service staff that manages the grounds were very interested and eager to help. So last week they signed up as station number DC-DC-19 and station name “The White House”. Then on Monday, March 23, 2015 – thanks to our combined efforts to improve precipitation tracking – I got to represent CoCoRaHS in the East Wing of the White House and spend time with some of our brightest and most creative youth at the [White House Science Fair](#). Thanks for gifting me this unique opportunity. The rain gauge was not mentioned publicly during the program, but I took an extra gauge with me just in case :) and got to share CoCoRaHS with many officials and science leaders. I met with the new observer – the National Park Service's supervising horticulturalist -- and got a peek at the new gauge from a safe distance – perfectly leveled and beveled! Fantastic. It was a good day! [Click here to read the official fact sheet](#) issued by The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

P.S. The Weather Channel also highlighted CoCoRaHS last week (you had to get up early – 6:15 EDT on a Saturday morning – not exactly prime time, but still . . .). Also, [NOAA recently released this video](#) highlighting my job as state climatologist, as well as some CoCoRaHS volunteers. And finally, a TV production company working on a series of shows on Citizen Science for PBS will be traveling to our office next week to document what we do, and a Canadian TV producer is planning something similar up north. Who knows what the future holds. So much publicity for something so simple seems a bit odd. But for today at least, our efforts are appreciated and are being recognized. Who would have thunk it!

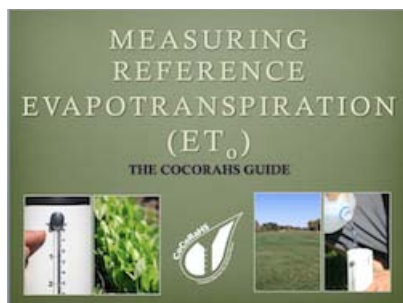
Hail and Significant Weather Reports



Hail: It's that time of year again. CoCoRaHS's Annual Hail Week takes place April 6-11th. If you experience hail at your home location, please fill out a hail report (found in the left hand menu of your data entry form, [or click here and save it as a bookmark](#)). It only takes a minute but it feeds directly to the National Weather Service and may help in issuing or verifying severe thunderstorm warnings. Remember, you don't need a hail pad in order to report hail. If you're on the road or at some other location and have a smart phone, you can submit data to a separate NOAA weather reporting network called [mPING](#). (mPING only records the type of precipitation, not the amount.)

Significant Weather Report: Some is true here. If you're in the middle of a heavy storm or some other significant weather (freezing rain, heavy fog, high winds, etc) use the [“CoCoRaHS Significant Weather Report”](#) to file your special observation. Here, please remember to still submit your total amount the next morning for your normal 24-hour measurement.

ET: Coming Home



For those of you already measuring evapotranspiration (ET) for CoCoRaHS, thanks tons. You'll be getting your spring letter from Zach any day. [Click here](#) if you'd like to know more about what's involved in measuring and reporting ET. We desperately need volunteers in CT, DE, ID, LA, MA, MS, NE, RI, SC, SD and VT.

Soil Moisture

Just a heads up that with ongoing [interest in drought](#) and the water balance, and a recent [new satellite launched this winter by NASA](#), CoCoRaHS hopes to pilot test a basic measurement of soil moisture soon. Don't contact me quite yet until we figure out the details, but if you're curious about soil moisture and how to measure it, we may soon have the opportunity.

Farm Story

I haven't been doing my share of the chores lately. Between my day job as State Climatologist for Colorado, the hundreds of new volunteers signing up this month, the White House invitation, and seemingly endless "water meetings", I just haven't been that useful at home. Fortunately, my wife loves the farm and the animals, and we have a talented young woman from Texas staying with us helping with chores and learning the art and science of making great compost. At least I did manage to restock the old barn with hay for the horses on Saturday. It was perfect weather - 60s, calm and sunny – and our helper was practicing her cello (very competently I might add). I don't believe I've ever enjoyed stacking hay quite that much with live musical accompaniment.

Demise of Rooster #2. Actually, there is one story, albeit brief, and there were no witnesses. Last week, our gentle red rooster (rooster #1) who recently rescued me from attack from the bold and majestic white rooster (Rooster #2 – generally not recommended) had a disagreement. We don't know what happened or how, but Rooster #2 was found, deceased. I was spared the job of rooster culling, as Rooster #1 (half the size of Rooster#2) appears to have taken it into his own hands. And hence, the end.

Have a great spring, and please know your volunteer efforts (past, present and/or future) are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken and the CoCoRaHS team
NOAA's Weather Ready Nation Ambassador Program
Colorado State University

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