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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NETWORK OF VOLUNTEER RAINFALL OBSERVERS MAKES ITS WASHINGTON DEBUT



Washington is the latest state to join a rapidly growing network of volunteer rainfall observers across the country.

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, and Snow (CoCoRaHS) Network enlists volunteers to take daily rainfall measurements and report them to the CoCoRaHS web site, www.cocorahs.org. "These measurements provide an instant look at statewide patterns of rainfall that can help in weather forecasting, disaster management, drought monitoring, and research," said one of the state coordinators, Josiah Mault of the Office of Washington State Climatologist at the University of Washington.

"Observers can send intense rain reports that are disseminated directly to the meteorologists at the National Weather Service, which will be crucial during flash flood events," said Jeff Michalski, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Seattle.

On the other extreme, the real-time reporting will augment the NWS's Cooperative weather observing program in providing better real-time drought diagnosis, says State Climatologist Philip Mote, the other state coordinator.

CoCoRaHS, based at Colorado State University, was officially launched in Washington on June 1. It was organized by a group that includes the Office of Washington State Climatologist at UW and staff from the four National Weather Service forecast offices covering the state.

Volunteers who want to become observers must purchase a standard 4-inch rain gauge for about \$25 and attend a training session. The first training events are scheduled for June 10 at several locations around the state.

"In the few days since the program began in Washington, we already have dozens of people signed up to be observers, just from word of mouth," said Ted Buehner, warning coordination meteorologist at the Seattle weather service office. "People love the weather and this is a great way to get involved - you can immediately see your measurement on the state or national map."

The first observer to sign-up, Vince Streano of Anacortes, was so eager to join CoCoRaHS that he bought a CoCoRaHS rain gauge over a month ago. "The CoCoRaHS program will be a valuable tool in determining accurate rainfall patterns across the state, and the country, because everyone will be using the same standard rain gauge," said Streano.

Like a fan camped out waiting for concert tickets to go on sale, he checked the CoCoRaHS site every day to see when the registrations opened, and plans to write about CoCoRaHS in his monthly weather column for the Anacortes American newspaper.

Robin Fox, weather service forecaster in Spokane, said official rain gauges can be as much as 50 miles apart over widely varied terrain.

"You can miss a lot of data that way," Fox said. "CoCoRaHS fills in the gaps of the current observation network."

Added Ellie Kelch, another weather service forecaster in Spokane, "The additional precipitation data collected will allow scientists to better understand micro-climates across the state and greatly assist meteorologists in the forecast process."

More information is available at cocorahs.org or climate.washington.edu

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