

CISA & CoCoRaHS Citizen Science Condition Monitoring Project

Observer Conference Call

Wednesday, July 8, 2015, 2:00 p.m.

Below are a few key points from a conference call held Wednesday, July 8, 2015 with 4 CoCoRaHS condition monitoring volunteers. The purpose of the call was to share project updates and answer questions or address concerns observers have about submitting condition monitoring reports. If you have additional questions, comments, or concerns you can reach Amanda Brennan at abrennan@sc.edu or (803) 777-6875.

CISA Team Members: Amanda Brennan, Janae Davis, David Eckhardt, Sumi Selvaraj

Project Updates

- Condition monitoring observers have submitted over 1,000 reports since September 2013.
- CISA team members analyze the content of each of these reports in order to produce maps, graphics and other informational materials demonstrating the content of the reports.
- CISA team members began informal interviews with drought decision makers in December 2014 to ask for feedback about how the condition monitoring reports can be/are being used to support drought planning and preparedness. We have talked with
 - SC state climatologist who serves as the state CoCoRaHS coordinator and leads the [SC Drought Response Committee](#)
 - NC state CoCoRaHS assistant coordinator
 - [NC Drought Management Advisory Council](#) representative
 - [US Drought Monitor](#) authors
 - [National Drought Impacts Reporter](#) representative
 - CoCoRaHS founder and CoCoRaHS web developer
- Janae and Sumi attended the [International Symposium on Society and Resource Management](#) in Charleston, SC, June 13 – 15 and gave a poster presentation summarizing the project and a few of the key findings from these interviews.
 - View a copy of their poster [here](#).

Feedback on the Newsletter and Blog

- CISA team members compile a monthly newsletter and maintain the “Cuckoo for CoCoRaHS in the Carolinas” blog in order to share project updates, news and items of interest with project volunteers.
- During the call, we asked for feedback on these materials to see what components are most useful and what additional types of information we might provide to help support volunteers in their observations and reporting.
 - One observer mentioned that the US Drought Monitor map was interesting to look at to determine if the conditions he was seeing were representative of the level of dryness shown on the map. In some instances, he has found that the map doesn’t necessarily reflect what he is seeing on the ground.
 - **Reporting Tip:** A comparison of what you are seeing in your area and the level of dryness shown on the US Drought Monitor map would be excellent information to include in your weekly condition monitoring report. You can access the US Drought Monitor map [here](#). It is updated every Thursday. If you think that the map shows more or less dryness than you are experiencing at your home or in the surrounding area, sharing how your observations differ from (or confirm) what is shown on the map would be great information to include!

Condition Monitoring Tips from Fellow Observers

- Edna Gaston ([Leasburg, NC](#) near Hyco Lake) is a Master Gardener and long-term observer of nature. She has been submitting condition monitoring reports since February 2014. Edna shared a few tips about the observations she makes in her area and how she submits her condition monitoring reports. Below are a few ideas from Edna about her observations and reporting process:
 - Use Drought Impact Reporting Categories on the online form as “cues” for the information to include in the report (e.g., the “tourism and recreation” category reminds her to note activity she has seen on Hyco Lake or at the marina).
 - She receives water level updates for Hyco Lake from USGS and includes information when water levels are above or below normal in her reports.
 - Sign up for water level alerts in your area here: <http://water.usgs.gov/wateralert/>.
 - Looking closely reveals even small amounts of change from week to week. For example, there might be fewer butterflies or bees on flowering plants or a new migratory bird species at the feeder that you might not have seen yet this year.
 - Heavy rains usually trigger her to look at water quality impacts in the lake due to runoff.
- Edna’s comments prompted a few other suggestions from other observers on the call.
 - Ed Barrows indicated that he is less systematic in his reporting, but uses it as an opportunity to take a walk around his property to make observations that he then reports.
 - Linda Phillip, who lives on Daniels Island, SC noted the variability in rainfall between the island where she lives and nearby Mt. Pleasant and Charleston. She looks for differences in conditions in surrounding areas, where rainfall amounts might vary quite a bit, to include in her report.

More Reporting Ideas

Observers indicated that they did not include information in the “society and public health” and “energy” reporting categories as often. Below are a few ideas for observations to consider in these categories for your reports.

- Society and Public Health reporting category
 - During summer months, you might consider if higher temperatures are influencing your outdoor activities or those of others (e.g., are there heat advisories from the local weather service?)
 - You might see impacts of season allergies that are affected by how much rainfall we may or may not have received (e.g., lots of pollen in the air because we haven’t had a good rain to wash it away)
 - Winter weather can certainly impact society as well. For example, roadways might not be safe for travel due to snow and ice.
- Energy reporting category
 - During extreme temperature events (hot or cold) are you running the HVAC unit more?
 - Have there been any local news reports about cooling stations being made available in your area during heat waves or other ways communities are providing assistance? (You could check the “society and public health” category for this one as well)
- There is a link to “More information on categories of drought impacts and condition monitoring reports” on the CoCoRaHS drought impact report form that you use to submit your condition monitoring reports. You must be logged in to the CoCoRaHS website to view the form.
- Consider looking beyond just your backyard for report ideas. Your neighborhood, town and even county are appropriate areas to cover in your condition monitoring reports.

Reporting Change over Time

- David asked the group about how they compare change through time. That is, do they compare conditions from week to week, or do they look for differences between current conditions and those they might have seen several weeks or even a month ago.
 - Ed indicated that he does make observations about seasonal changes in water levels (e.g., what water levels are like in the river near his home in summer vs. spring months).
 - In general, the consensus was that observers compare current conditions in the past few weeks.

The Reporting Process

Observers had a few suggestions about how the condition monitoring reporting process might be improved. The CISA team will share these with the folks at CoCoRaHS headquarters, who maintains the website and online reporting form.

- Add description boxes next to each reporting category so that observers can provide information about the different categories. This will also help observers think about what information to include in reports. A report outline or questionnaire was also suggested as a way to help observers know what to share.
- Make it clearer on the CoCoRaHS homepage where to go to submit a condition monitoring report.
 - For now, you can find a link to step-by-step instructions for submitting a report on the CISA website at:
<http://www.cisa.sc.edu/PDFs/Instructions%20for%20Submitting%20Weekly%20Condition%20Monitoring%20Reports.pdf>
- If you have other comments or suggestions about the reporting process, please feel free to share. Just e-mail your thoughts to Amanda at abrennan@sc.edu.