



Solar for All!

A blog by Jule Asterisk, Keepers of the Athabasca, August 30, 2016

We are really in transition now. As a planet, we are having the warmest year on record (again) in 2016¹; with the Arctic sea ice disappearing at record speed², and massive forest fires around the world³, climate change is clearly ramping up. The low lying Louisiana swamps are disappearing at the rate of several football fields per day, to the point of threatening thousands of kilometres of oil pipelines with sea burial⁴. Fracking in the Montney play around Fort St. John, B.C. has been causing earthquakes which will threaten the integrity of the planned Site C Dam⁵. It's come to that point in history – when the energy systems we use are having such a widespread planetary effect that it is actually threatening these very systems we use! The western paradigm of ever expanding growth is exposed as ultimately unworkable.

There is evidence that professional skeptics have skewed the science on climate change⁶. Some wealthy individuals and companies who stand to benefit from leaving our world energy systems the way they currently are have poured millions into deliberately manufacturing doubt about what the science actually says⁷. Threatening the entire planet for short term gain will hopefully one day bring real consequences for the individuals and companies responsible. Incredible and ever increasing risks to human beings, property, and the environment are being fought in real time on the ground by people, plants, and animals, wildfire departments, municipalities implementing flood controls, and governments passing climate legislation. In an effort to encourage people to speak to our elected officials about risk, the Insurance Bureau of Canada issued a deck of collectable cards with our Alberta MLA's on one side and extreme weather costs on the other⁸, 65% of which are in Alberta.

¹ <http://www.livescience.com/55469-2016-could-be-hottest-year-on-record.html>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2016/aug/22/historical-documents-reveal-arctic-sea-ice-is-disappearing-at-record-speed>

³ http://mashable.com/2016/07/18/siberia-forest-fires-smoke-satellite/#jgHu.PwR_SqT

⁴ <http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Oil-Pipelines-In-Louisiana-May-Soon-Be-Buried-At-Sea.html>

⁵ <http://ens-newswire.com/2016/08/21/fracking-near-peace-river-dams-scares-bc-hydro/>

⁶ <http://mobile.businessinsider.com/one-chart-shows-how-climate-change-deniers-are-skewing-statistics-to-fit-their-view-2015-12>

⁷ http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=16925

⁸ <http://www.abc.ca/nb/resources/studies/weather-story>

By contrast, in some First Nations communities, the status quo of perpetual growth has been seen as an impediment to true relationship with the land, and is not valued as a way to protect our future. After so many generations attempting to remove Indigenous values by Canadian governments and society at large, traditional knowledge regarding how to live in harmony with our planet has generally kept to itself. Now that the entire planet is under threat, perhaps appreciation for First Nations paradigms can become imminent. Many First Nations communities are interested in producing power in ways that benefit our planet instead of damaging it⁹, and as a consequence, benefit their communities. According to Keepers of the Athabasca Co-chair Cleo Reece (Fort McMurray First Nation), “We need to stop our dependence on fossil fuels for energy and focus on renewable sources such as the abundant energy from the sun, and learn how to build and maintain our own energy systems.”

Keepers of the Athabasca are in the process of developing two solar installation projects with First Nations in Alberta. Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation is managing our partnership at her nation, along with other women heading up the Training Team, Site Team, and Garden Team, engaging their community in order to make decisions about where and how the solar equipment will be installed. Crystal expands on the theme; “As First Nations move toward reclaiming our self sustaining systems based on natural law, breaking down systemic oppression, and enforcing our self governing structures, we do so with the hope that banking on the sun, the success of First nation economic sovereignty based on our inherent and Treaty rights will bring balance to our Mother Earth and all living breathing things.”

The key we need for a sustainable future is described by Crystal as “balance” with the natural systems that sustain our world. We know of many energy production technologies that can accomplish this: solar, wind, run-of-river hydro and others. Locally produced power strengthens our electricity grid; instead of massive plants losing almost 10% of the energy they produce through high power transmission lines¹⁰, power entering the grid at multiple locations feeds each of these locations first. Instead of huge megaprojects such as damaging and dangerous hydroelectric dams, micro-production and less intrusive technologies are a way that community organizations, First Nations, schools, and individuals should be able to produce their own power, for their own use and profit. It’s time to grow smarter, not simply larger. Unfortunately, our current system in Alberta is rigged to prevent this. Keepers of the Athabasca and our partners at Solar4All are calling for an end to the 1mW cap that small energy producers are restricted to. We want the provincial government to provide a level playing field for energy production, and not penalize small producers with “22 simple steps” to get the all of the appropriate permits for small scale energy production and sales.

Keepers of the Athabasca Co-chair Harvey Scott, is installing solar power at his farm. He and his wife expect a small premium from the power they produce; even though regulations are not

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXUTA675NB8>

¹⁰ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.LOSS.ZS?locations=CA>

conducive right now. We hope and expect announcements from the Alberta government in September 2016 that will help level the energy field. From what we understand, our provincial government will be making announcements about regulatory changes for solar, wind, and small power producers. Harvey says, "Our government needs to put their dollars where their mouth is with the new carbon tax, and show that they want to encourage individuals and cooperatives. The level of subsidy for solar has to be at least as great as the subsidies for the oil patch has been for the past number of decades." With carbon reduction commitments by both our federal and provincial governments, it can be seen as our patriotic duty to put solar panels on as many roofs as are appropriate to receive sun. We need enabled individuals, community groups, First Nations, schools, and all those who want to, to produce their own power. So much has been written about Alberta's incredible solar resource: greater than that of many other countries who are fully engaged with renewable technologies. Not only will small scale renewables make our power grid stronger, it will allow us to develop the balance with nature that we must have, in order to have a future for our children, grandchildren, and future generations.