

Watt's Happening? #103

by Don Pettit

for Peace Energy Renewable Energy Cooperative

www.peaceenergy.ca ph 250-782-3882



Global Energy Update

You may have noticed: the conventional energy scene (coal, oil, gas) is a wee bit volatile these days.

First LNG is going to put a trillion dollars in BC's coffers, then almost overnight it's not.

Natural gas, our "30 year transition fuel" has suddenly become our "10 year transition fuel," and now it's looking like we barely need a transition fuel at all. All we have to do instead is simply get on with the transition.

Site C dam seemed OK at first. A reasonable extension of the existing dam network on the Peace River, and after all hydropower IS "renewable" (not "clean," by any stretch of the imagination in this case, just renewable).

And we were reassured that we "needed" the power "for all those electric cars that David Suzuki wants" (BC's energy minister actually said that on CBC radio last year!).

Now, after a closer look at the figures, Site C seems more a product of ego and politics than actual need.

And Shell is pulling out of the Alberta oil sands! Instead, it's upping its investments in renewables to \$1 billion a year, because of the disappearing "acceptance of the energy system as we have it." What?!

This kind of volatility and unpredictability in the conventional energy scene has long been expected during this time of rapid transition.

The good news, of course, is that the alternative energy scene, mostly wind and solar, is showing unprecedented, predictable growth. Oh sure there will be setbacks, as vested interests try to put the breaks on, but it's clear now that the shift to clean energy is unstoppable. It just makes too much sense.



The first time I saw a big wind turbine spinning in the distance I was curious, then I had a closer look and fell in love. I don't know why, I just did, and now I know I am not alone. Advanced technology, we of like mind believe, can be both useful and beautiful. (Bear Mountain Wind Park, D. Pettit photo)

HOW BIG IS HUGE?

Regular readers of *Watt's Happening* will already know that global investment in the clean energies of wind and solar has exceeded investments in fossil fuels and nuclear combined for two years now. Well, it just keeps on going.

The clean energy industry in the U.S. alone is now worth an amazing US \$200 billion a year, which is about the same as America's pharmaceutical manufacturing sector and catching up with consumer electronics.

Worldwide, it's the same story. Clean energy is a US\$1.4 trillion industry globally, well ahead of air travel, tied with apparel and catching up to media. The growth rate of the global economy is about 3 percent per year. The growth rate of the clean energy sector is close to 7 percent annually.

So don't let anybody tell you that renewable energies like wind and solar are a niche market or a passing fad. Hardly.

ALBERTA'S CARBON TAX

After just a few months, Alberta is putting its carbon tax to work. Albertans are being offered rebates for rooftop solar panels and a program to install free energy-saving lights, showerheads and thermostats.

That's putting money in the pockets of Albertans, and cleaning up their environment at the same time.

That's how carbon taxes are supposed to work: tax the carbon emitters, and use that money to encourage low-carbon energies, preferably right back to the folks who paid the tax in the first place. Too bad BC hasn't figured out how to use their carbon tax yet.

WIND FARMS NEED COMMUNITY

A new study shows that wind farms in Nova Scotia are three times as popular as wind farms in Ontario. The study concludes that involving local communities in the planning and benefits of wind farms makes a big difference.

At Peace Energy Cooperative, we already know this. Bear Mountain Wind Park was BC's first commercial wind facility, and one might have expected huge push back as local residents faced the unknown.

But Peace Energy and their partners held some 30 public meetings, long before such meetings were required by the environmental assessment. Real information and community engagement made all the difference, a lesson Ontario has now learned

the hard way.

By the way, the new term for energy derived from wind and solar is no longer "alternative energy." Now it's called "advanced energy."

I like that, because that's what it is. Forward ho!

So don't let anybody
tell you that renewable
energies like wind and
solar are a niche market
or a passing fad.
Hardly.

