

Watt's Happening? #176

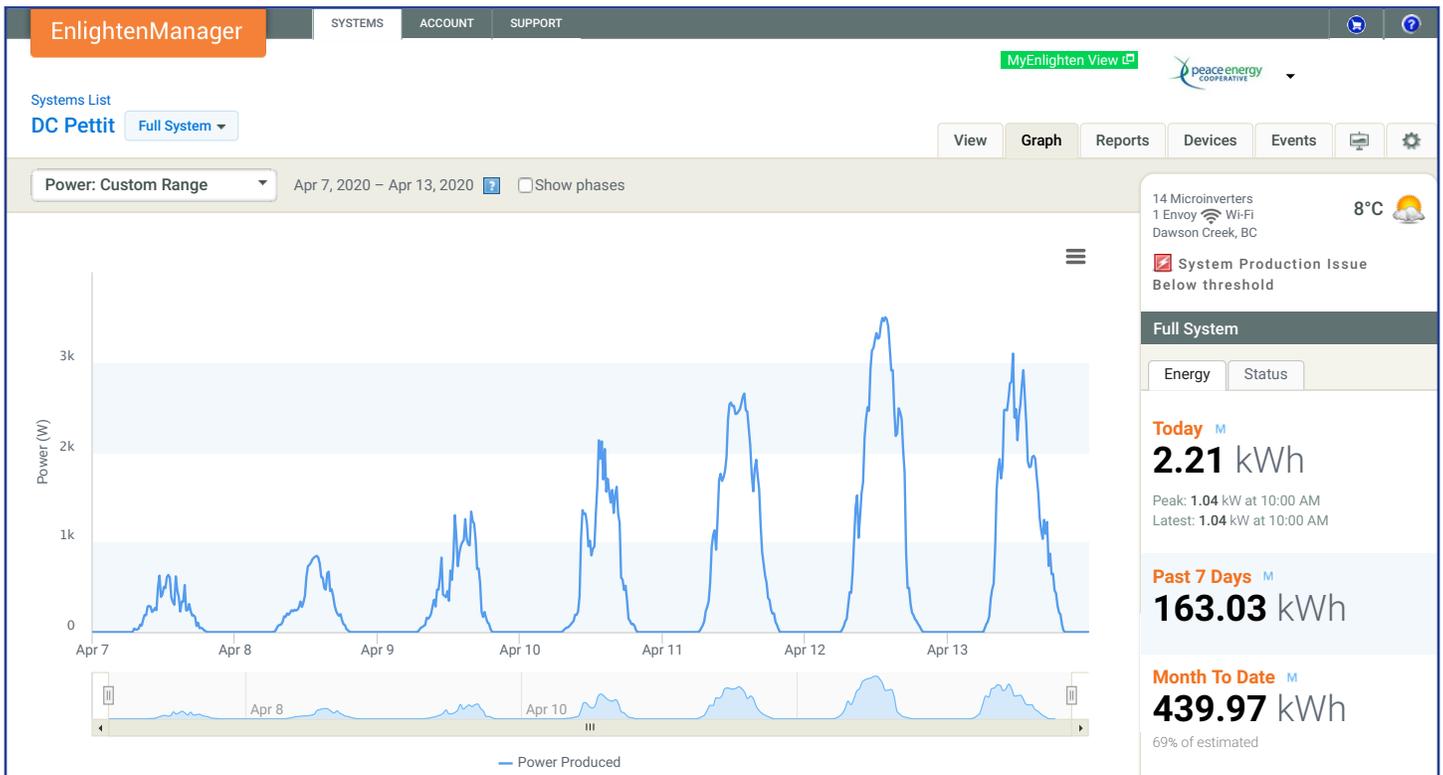
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Seeing the Spring come in



To solar nerds like me, this graph is one of the best things ever. It shows the real-life output of my roof-top home solar array as it feeds more and more power into the grid as winter snow melts off: a sure sign of spring!

“One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the Spring come in.” So wrote Henry David Thoreau in his beloved book “Walden.”

Unless you are a front-line worker (and how grateful we all are for those front-line workers who keep us safe and well-supplied!) you are working at home. With luck you may now have the “leisure and opportunity to see the Spring come in,” a rare event in our modern world of ceaseless distraction.

During these strange times of pandemic isolation, one of the best things we can do for ourselves is to spend some time outdoors, in nature.

Whether its raking leaves in your back yard, walking through a spring forest suddenly free of snow, or sitting by a creek and listening to the water run, being outdoors in the spring is a special experience that perhaps we now have the rare luxury to enjoy.

WATCHING THE SOLAR COME IN

Being a major solar geek, one of my personal spring “happy things” has been watching the solar come in.

This is the first spring for my new 5,000 watt grid-tied solar array on my home near Dawson Creek, so while working at home I have had the

opportunity to watch the snow melt off the solar array and the solar energy power up, big-time!

Like most modern solar installations, my array feeds energy info via Wi-Fi to a website that displays my real-time solar energy output, plus graphs showing output over the day, week, the month or the year.

Mostly up here in the north we don't care if our grid-tied solar array is covered with snow, because we have made so much power during our amazing long-day summers that we can coast through the winter using up our summer energy credits.

In my case I actually want snow to remain on my rooftop solar panels as long as possible, because I count on that snowmelt to fill

my cistern every spring. So as the snow melts off the array, each day I can see my power rise with the sun.

A small pleasure perhaps, but one that has great meaning for those of us who "get" solar and the promise it holds. Solar energy is now the cheapest and most reliable energy source across much of the world, and for that reason it is the fastest growing energy source ever.

CLEAN ENERGY HOPE

While the fossil energy industry staggers with uncertainty (oil at minus \$37 a barrel, \$12 trillion divested!) jobs in clean energy are exploding.

Last year was a tipping point in the U.S. and Canada: for the first time, more people held jobs in clean energy than in fossil fuels.

U.S. coal, for instance, has steadily declined to about 50,000 jobs from a peak of 178,000 in 1985, while jobs in wind and solar now account for 769,000 in the US, increasing 12 times faster than the US economy.

Energy efficiency jobs now total roughly 2.2 million in the US. Another 174,000 are busy building electric cars.



Another sign of spring: solar electricity climbs as snow melts and fills the cistern.

The parallels between the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change cannot be denied. Both affect every human being on Earth, no exceptions. Some countries chose not to participate in the World Wars, for instance, but there is no choosing with C-19 or climate change.

The good news is that thanks to C-19 we have now

proven that planet-wide, global collective action is entirely possible, exactly what we'll need to address our next big challenge. And we already have the vaccine for climate change: clean energy!

"A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts. We should be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the influence of the slightest dew that falls on it . . . We loiter in winter while it is already spring."

Spring is a time of new growth, new life, renewed hope and new opportunities. Let's not "loiter in winter while it is already spring."