

Living Off the Grid

Many people have dreamed about power bill freedom and for my wife and me this became a reality in 2003.

For ten years I looked for that ultimate piece of land with some water on it. Finally I came across "the property". We had to hike 500 feet from the county road just to get to the corner of the quarter section. It was thick bush and muskeg, but with further hiking we came to a 30 acre lake covered in snow. That was January 2000, and we immediately purchased the property not knowing the challenges ahead.

The deal had concluded in February and about the same time I was investigating the cost for electricity. I was shocked to learn that it was going to cost me \$27,000 plus brushing, plus easements to get power to our dream property. I figured I could do anything and be cheaper than \$27k plus, so began my quest to understand alternative energy.

After talking to many people in the industry on what I would require to power my home I had no definitive answers. So I started to look at what each off grid system has in common and found that they all had a back-up generator. I knew it would be expensive to run a generator 24 hours per day but at least I would have power. Then I looked at adding an inverter and batteries and found that not only did it work but it only cost \$18 a month for diesel.

With the three pieces of equipment we were now living off grid, charging our batteries 2 hours every 3 days. We then decided to add 1200 watts of solar and found that for most of the year we charge our batteries once or twice a month.

The most frustrating part of the whole ordeal is that of all the people I had talked to (mostly salesman in the business) 80 % didn't know the product they were selling. Of the 20% left, 15% kind of knew a little bit about alternative energy and 5% actually knew a lot about it, all were extremely expensive...and none of them LIVED off grid.

Out of this frustration I did two things. One was to do it myself by importing equipment from all over North America and installing my system. Two, was to start a company (SolarPanel.ca) offering affordable prices, innovative energy saving products and to hold seminars once a month so that others could see a live working off grid system.

Alternative Energy is totally portable in that I can move our equipment to another site and be powered up in less than two days. It also never goes off, never fluctuates or spikes unlike the grid power. And the best part is that we did not compromise our lifestyle as we have plenty of electrical power for all our appliances including the big screen TV, central vacuum, etc, and even our 220v well pump.

Providing our own electricity has been an experience my wife and I enjoy everyday without having to pay a monthly power bill, and not looking at those power lines. What we know we share with others in our monthly seminars so they might obtain this same freedom.