

Making Ripples

Save the Ozarks with Solar Panels

by Amanda Bancroft

Sometimes, living a sustainable lifestyle is as easy as eating a delicious organic cookie. More often, it's as hard as trying to figure out how to fuel your coffee maker with a pet hamster. For those who don't have a hamster wheel but still want to make the switch to an alternative energy source, it's helpful to have strong motivation. Few motivational forces can match a gigantic power line cutting across your land, damaging the fragile karst that protects our groundwater, and creating an eyesore at historic recreational areas. That's enough to make almost anyone want to switch to solar.

For me, this is still a scary decision even if I am highly motivated. So a solar energy project benefits from a supportive community to back you up. Ripples' blog is 100% solar-hosted and we are planning to use solar panels for our earthbag headquarters. Along the way, we'll be sharing every resource we encounter so the journey may be easier for you. One such resource is Jerry Landrum, Chair of the Eureka Springs Climate Action Progress Committee. Landrum brings his solar panels to power the Eureka Springs farmer's market, and answers any questions visitors may have about solar. According to the Eureka Springs Independent, Landrum and his team of carpenter Carl Evans and electrician Lyle Pinkley recently installed panels on the workshop of Michael and Faith Shah. The couple has devoted themselves to fighting SWEPCO and switching to solar. "We've always wanted to go solar...SWEPCO lit the match and got us off our butts," Faith was quoted.

For a sense of community momentum in 2013, why not check out SavetheOzarks.org and join the Shah family in switching to solar? Save the Ozarks opposes SWEPCO's plan to install a new 345 kV transmission line from their Shipe Road Station near Centerton (Benton County) to their proposed new Kings River Station NW of Berryville (Carroll County). This would involve bulldozing 900 acres of Ozark forest for their 50-mile-long power line, and routinely spraying herbicides along the right-of-way. Using alternative energy reduces demand for forest-gulping electricity sources like this project.

The most basic pieces necessary to switch to solar power, besides the financing, are the panels, a charge controller, a battery bank, and an inverter. You can start small and focus on getting just one of those components while studying solar power and deciding what's best for you – your home might even benefit from incentives and rebates. (For more information, visit RipplesBlog.org) There are local businesses that can provide expertise and products, such as Rocky Grove Sun Company, Sun City Solar Energy, and Stitt Energy Systems. This supports the local economy, reduces the demand for power that destroys the Ozarks, and saves your hamster from having to power your entire house.

Ripples is a 100% solar-hosted website that includes a blog, newspaper column, resources and services for individuals and non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org