

## Interview with Dan Balaban<sup>1</sup>

Co-founder, President and CEO of Greengate Power  
A leading Canadian renewable energy company  
Alberta, Canada



**Interviewed by Aina Aliieva**  
International Correspondent, PM World Journal

### Introduction to the interviewee

[Dan Balaban](#) is the Co-Founder, President and CEO of Greengate Power ([www.greengatepower.com](http://www.greengatepower.com)), a leading Canadian renewable energy company *that is developing [the 465-megawatt Travers solar project](#)*. Based in Calgary, Dan is an award-winning entrepreneur with a proven track record of successful business ventures.

Construction is slated to begin this year on the Travers Solar Project, which, upon completion, will become the largest operating solar energy facility in Canada and one of the largest in the world. Developed by Greengate Power, the CA\$700 million project in Vulcan County, Alberta, is expected to provide enough electricity for over 100,000 homes, as well as a boost to the local economy. Travers Solar was selected as one of the Top 10 Most Influential Projects by Region by the Project Management Institute in 2020.

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## Interview

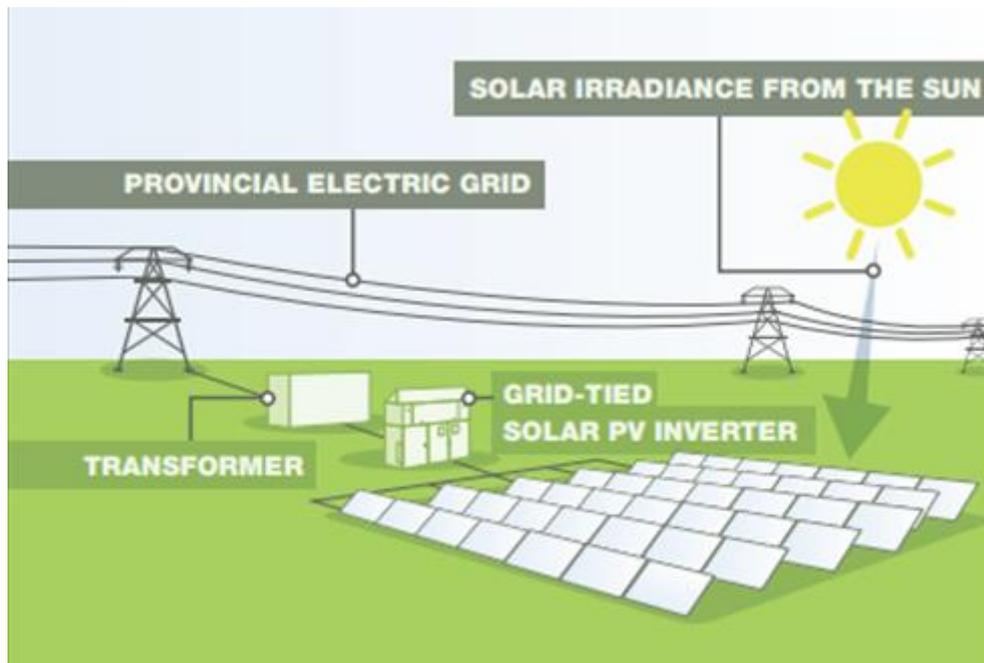
**Q1:** Hello Dan, could you tell me about yourself, please? From what I gathered, you started your career in IT. What made you switch from IT to energy?

**Dan Balaban (Balaban):** Yes, I started my career in technology. I have a Computer Science background. I started my career in a consulting company advising people on how to use, at the time, a new technology called the Internet (laughs) to improve their businesses. I actually see many parallels between what is going on now during this energy transition and what happened during the last couple of decades in technology. Just as the Internet fundamentally changed the way we conduct business, I believe that the clean energy transition is going to fundamentally change the way we produce and consume energy. It is a positive disruptive force which can help ensure the sustainability of human civilization.

Also, I was always interested in environmental issues. The technology company I founded which started my entrepreneurial journey provided operations and management solutions for the oil and gas industry. We helped oil and gas companies to manage greenhouse gas emission reporting on an annual basis, so it gave me some early exposure to looming environmental issues that the fossil fuel industry was facing. I successfully exited my software company back in 2005. After that, I knew the next thing I wanted to do was something that could both help an industry in transition and something that would leave a positive environmental impact on the world. And that was the genesis for Greengate - the idea of combining challenging and exciting business opportunities with one that would leave a lasting positive impact on the world.

**Q2:** Could you tell me a bit more about the Travers project?

**Balaban:** It is a 465 MegaWatt, \$700 million project which will produce power for more than 100,000 homes. It will be built in southern Alberta, 150 km south of Calgary, on 3000 acres of land. There will be 1.5 million solar panels (also referred to as solar PV modules), which absorb the sun's rays as a source of energy for generating electricity. These modules are used as components of a more extensive PV system when connected with other modules. We will employ single access tracking technology, so that the modules can move throughout the day to track the sun in order to maximize energy production during the day. Travers Solar will also utilize bifacial modules, a technology that allows electricity to be generated from both the front and the backside of the module. The project is not under construction yet but when we get to this stage, we expect around 500 people to work on it.



**Q3:** Your company works with wind energy, yet last year, you initiated the Travers Solar Project. What made you change your focus from wind to solar power?

**Balaban:** We have never focused on any particular technology. We have always been technology agnostic. We are focused on projects that provide a significant environmental benefit and deliver a strong financial return. Harnessing renewable energy sources is definitely a significant environmental benefit, so broadly speaking, we are into the renewable space. Technology constantly evolves. When we first started the business, it seemed like wind technology was the ideal fit for Alberta's needs at the time. But then solar technology continued to improve dramatically, and the Alberta power market developed as well. We figured now is a great time to build a solar project like Travers – the largest in Canada and one of the largest in the world.

**Q4:** It is so challenging to implement projects on such a scale. What do you think are the key ingredients that allow your projects to be successful?

**Balaban:** We have a great team. We started Greengate with a vision to develop renewable energy on an unprecedented scale. You know, at the time, renewable energy was not as cool as it is today, but still, it was a growing industry for many decades. It is critically important to have a great team, but I'd say having a vision and having the courage to embark into the unknown and sticking through with perseverance are equally important, since even the greatest ideas are extremely difficult to take through to completion.



Every entrepreneurial experience that I have been involved in has been much harder and lengthier than I expected at the start. But if you stick with it for long enough and your vision is solid and your execution is great, I believe the work will eventually pay off.

**Q5:** Do you have any competitors in your field?

**Balaban:** Renewable energy is a rapidly developing space. Any place in the world that is looking to build new power generation now - you know there is a good probability it is going to come from renewables, it is certainly on a cost basis. Here in Canada, there are pretty large IPPs (Independent power producers) that are developing projects both in Canada and globally. But I would say what we have done is unprecedented. There has never been a company that's developed greenfield projects in Canada as large as what we have. But there are other great Canadian companies in this field, such as Brookfield, Innergex, Northland, BluEarth, etc. What makes us different is that we are a Canadian company developing massive projects on an unprecedented scale in Canada.

**Q6:** Did COVID-19 affect this project?

**Balaban:** COVID-19, in the beginning, introduced general uncertainties to the world and impacted some supply chains as well. But we have been able to work through all that, and our project remains on track. You know, COVID-19 caused a reset of the global economy and coming out of this reset, we have seen an acceleration in the transition

towards clean energy. There is even more interest in investing in this sector than prior to COVID-19. It seems the world is transitioning more quickly towards clean energy than before.

**Q7:** Does the project have any significant impact on wildlife?

**Balaban:** We had to do a year of environmental studies prior to the project, which meant we needed to comply with all aspects of the regulatory process. The project received a low impact rating from the environmental regulatory body, meaning it is expected to have minimal disruption of wildlife.

**Q7:** How long is the project expected to be operational? What happens at the end of the project's life?

**Balaban:** The project is expected to be operational for at least 35 years. At the end of the project life, the project will be decommissioned or repowered. If decommissioned, equipment such as the solar modules and racking could be recycled and salvaged.

## **Conclusion**

In terms of clean energy, Balaban believes that Alberta has great investment potential. "Our summertime solar resources, as good as those of the state of Florida, creates tremendous opportunities for growth in this industry."

## About the Interviewer



**Aina Aliieva**

Toronto, ON, Canada



**Aina Alive (Aliieva)** has 10+ years working in Project Management and an Agile environment.

She has managed and consulted on Technical, Construction, Telecom, Retail and Engineering projects. Aina is a Transformation Leader, Coach & Mentor. She helps individuals, teams and organizations in their transformation journey. Aina is passionate about productivity, creating a positive work environment and building Dream teams.

Aina has a Masters's degree in electrical engineering and an MBA in technology. She holds PMP and PMI-ACP certificates. Aina is a proud member of PMI CWCC (Canadian West Coast Chapter), PMIT (Toronto Chapter), PMI Ukraine Chapter and UAE PMI. She is also a Program Manager, Disciplined Agile in PMI CWCC and DA Ambassador in PMIT.

Aina is an experienced public speaker and coach. In her free time, Aina participates in different mentorship programs, speaks at webinars and interviews people for her blog.

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