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ANOTHER VIEW: A new U.S. energy policy can help NH's forestry industries

By Jameson French and Peter Stein

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With the health care bill now signed, there's been a lot of talk on Capitol Hill lately about pivoting back to a jobs agenda. One major proposal on the table in Washington is reshaping America's energy policy to encourage efficiency and deal with climate change.

That would be a good thing. And rural communities in New Hampshire, hit especially hard by the economic downturn, could be a big winner. If our elected officials speak up, that is.

As discussions on developing a compromise energy bill reach a critical stage, Sens. Judd Gregg and Jeanne Shaheen need to continue to make sure their colleagues recognize that the key to jobs in rural communities is the working landscapes to which they are connected.

Working forests have been a proud part of New Hampshire's heritage and economy for more than 150 years. Forestry-based activities, including primary forest products, saw milling and paper manufacturing, generate almost \$1.2 billion in gross revenues each year while providing more than 16,600 jobs. Agriculture in New Hampshire sustains 5,400 jobs, while tourism and recreation supply a staggering 64,000 more jobs.

In all, more than 25 percent of private sector employment in the Granite State is dependent on these three sectors and the natural and working landscapes that sustain them.

These same New Hampshire landscapes could play a key role in the shift to a low-carbon, climate-friendly economy if new incentives are provided to encourage sustainable land management practices that capture and store the greenhouse gas pollution responsible for climate change.

But they can't do that if they disappear completely, buried under the next strip mall or big-box store.

The energy and climate bill being discussed in the U.S. Senate is expected to generate new federal revenue through the auction of pollution emission allowances, offshore drilling royalties and new fuel fees.

Keeping New Hampshire's working and natural lands intact will be central to keeping New Hampshire jobs. As forest landowners and mill-owners, we know New Hampshire's woodlands play a critical role in sustaining our rural communities. If Capitol Hill wants to talk seriously about investment in our economy, legislators need to start by investing a portion of those funds in our working landscapes, the "natural infrastructure" that supports more than a quarter of our employment and is a part of our Granite State heritage.

It would be good for the climate, good for rural communities and good for New Hampshire.

Jameson French is president and chief executive officer of Northland Forest Products, Inc. Peter Stein is managing director of The Lyme Timber Company.