RESOLUTION # 9

WOODLANDS PROTECTION FUND

 **WHEREAS,** on May 15, 2023, Senator Robert W. Singer (R) introduced a bill directing the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to establish a program for the purpose of acquisition of development easements on privately-owned woodlands; and

 **WHEREAS,** establishment of a non-lapsing fund known as the “Woodlands Protection Fund” will provide monies for the acquisition by the State of development easements, conservation restrictions or easements, or any other restrictions or easements restricting, in perpetuity, development or privately-owned woodlands; and

 **WHEREAS**, the woodlands would be eligible for acquisition if they are at least five contiguous acres, and the woodlands shall be managed by the landowner with an approved forest stewardship plan approved pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2009, c.256 19 (C.13:1L-31) or a woodland management plan pursuant to section 3 of the "Farmland Assessment Act of 1964," P.L.1964, c.48 (C.54:4-23.3); and

 **WHEREAS**, woodlands preserved by the program will not require a landowner to provide public access to preserved land; and

 **WHEREAS**, approximately 40 percent of the total land area of New Jersey is covered by forests; half of which are privately owned; and

 **WHEREAS**, the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) has permanently preserved 2,852 farms covering 250,243 acres through the Farmland Preservation Program, including approximately 61,000 acres of forested upland and wetland;and

 **WHEREAS**, this bill directs the State Forester in the DEP to adopt rules and regulations within one year after the bill is enacted into law without the inclusion of the State Agriculture Development Committee; and

 **WHEREAS**, it is crucial to protect and preserve forested areas, protecting the habitat for plant and animal species.

 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, support the establishment of a program that acquires development easements for privately-owned woodlands.

 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Legislature to include a requirement in the legislation that the DEP and State Forester must consult with the SADC on the establishment of the development easement acquisition rules and regulations.