**RESOLUTION # 45**

**WOODLANDS PRESERVATION**

 **WHEREAS,** multiple bills have been introduced in the Legislature that seek to create permanent preservation of privately owned wooded lands, much like the preservation of farmland; and

 **WHEREAS,** establishment of a non-lapsing fund under these bills would provide monies for the acquisition by the State of development easements, conservation restrictions or easements, or any other restrictions or easements preventing, in perpetuity, development of privately-owned woodlands; and

 **WHEREAS**, the various bills call for woodlands to be eligible for acquisition under various criteria, with some of the bills establishing a program for woodland preservation in the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), others seeking to establish such a program in the Department of Environmental Protection and yet others seeking to simply declare forested lands as “agricultural lands” if they are used to create any “Specialty Crop” as defined by the USDA, including making maple syrup from tree sap; 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 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**, the various bills currently are being reviewed by the Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee, the Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee, the Senate Environment and Energy Committee, and the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee respectively; 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 110th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2025, support the establishment of a program that acquires development easements for privately-owned woodlands, provided such preservation through development easements includes a role for the SADC as the primary administrator of the preservation program.