

**Board of County Commissioners**

County of Hunterdon  
71 Main Street, Building #1  
PO Box 2900  
Flemington, NJ 08822-2900

**MEDIA RELEASE****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****DATE: June 3, 2021**

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## **Hunterdon Commissioners Join Land Preservation Groups Opposing Bills Mandating Unfunded Forestry Plans**

The Hunterdon County Board of Commissioners, at the June 1st Board meeting, called for the state legislature to listen to the concerns of land preservation stakeholders and re-examine legislation requiring unfunded forestry management state mandates.

The bills, A-4843, 4844 and 4845, are presently under consideration in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Commissioner Shaun C. Van Doren said, "These legislative initiatives deserve a further examination because there are too many organizations that support land and forest preservation, the protection of endangered animals and plant species, and protection of clean water, that have concerns about these bills."

The Board of Commissioners approved a Resolution strongly opposing the legislation and urging the legislative sponsors to consider the concerns raised by stakeholders.

Commissioner Van Doren reported that Monmouth and Warren County Boards of Commissioners had taken a position in opposition to the bills.

The legislative package requires county and local governments to prepare forest stewardship plans on forested preserved open space land exceeding 25 acres, excludes public participation in the management planning for public lands, reduces forest protections by setting standards for preserved forests that are the same as the lower standards for privately held lands, and establishes an arbitrary annual percentage for forest burns and regeneration.

Hunterdon County Planning and Land Use Department Director Carrie Fellows told the Board, "My understanding from research and discussions with staff and other colleagues is that 'forest stewardship' plans are typically created for bringing timber to market, and rarely take into consideration other elements of land stewardship."

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As defined in A-4844, a Forest Stewardship Plan must be written by a forester ‘or other professional’ - perhaps the professional requirements for plan authorship could be described more clearly to include additional environmental professionals with a broader understanding of the forest ecosystem.”

Board Director Susan J. Soloway noted, “Some of these ideas may be well intentioned, but here again we have the state usurping home rule and at the same time forcing county and local governments to spend tax dollars.”

The Hunterdon Board was advised by County Administrator Kevin Davis that representatives of numerous land preservation groups, including the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, Raritan Headwaters Association, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and New Jersey Forest Watch have opposed the bills.