

PRESS RELEASE
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Stop the Sand Mine Committee

Stop the Sand Mine: A potential \$22M Secret FDOT Land Deal Threatens Crystal River Aquifer, Floodplain, and Taxpayer Trust

Overview

Community advocates in Citrus County are sounding the alarm over the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) proposed acquisition of a 344-acre sand mine site in the heart of a protected aquifer recharge zone — a deal estimated to cost taxpayers more than **\$22 million** and counting.

The site, opposed by residents and environmental agencies, lies within the **Kings Bay Outstanding Florida Spring (OFS) Priority Focus Area** and a **FEMA-designated floodplain**. Yet FDOT has failed to disclose the purchase price, bypassed competitive sourcing, and initiated the process **without required a meaningful updated environmental review of phase 3A of the Suncoast Parkway**.

Taxpayer Risk and Financial Secrecy – Undisclosed Purchase Price and Unjustified Public Expenditure

If valued modestly at \$65,000 per acre, consistent with Florida borrow pit market rates, the proposed FDOT acquisition of the 344-acre Southworth sand mine would total **\$22.36 million**. Even at a discounted \$50,000 per acre, the total would exceed **\$17.2 million** in taxpayer funds.

This level of investment is alarming for a site that:

- **Sits within a FEMA-designated Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA)**, where base flood elevations range from 8.6 to 12.8 feet NAVD, while the proposed excavation depth drops as low as 2.3 feet NAVD, creating clear flood and recharge vulnerability;
- **Lies within the Kings Bay Outstanding Florida Spring (OFS) Priority Focus Area**, designated by the State of Florida for aquifer protection and nitrate reduction under the BMAP program;
- **And where FDOT/TestLab's own geotechnical investigation identified significant karst risk.** As stated in their engineering report:

"The site is underlain by limestone bedrock that is susceptible to dissolution and the subsequent development of karst features such as voids and sinkholes in the natural soil overburden. Construction in a sinkhole prone area is therefore accompanied by some risk that internal soil erosion and ground subsidence could affect the mine expansion in the future. It is not possible to investigate or design to completely eliminate the possibility of future sinkhole related problems. In any event, the Owner must understand and accept this risk."

The public has a right to know:

Why is the State fast-tracking a risky acquisition, purchasing a borrow pit **without transparency, competitive sourcing, or price justification?**

This level of secrecy is unacceptable when tens of millions of public dollars are at stake.

FDOT's Own Admissions Raise Further Red Flags

Residents who attended the **October 9, 2025 FDOT Open House** in Lecanto were told the following:

- **FDOT did not seek other sand sources** for Phase 3A — despite sourcing from multiple pits for prior Suncoast Parkway phases;

- This is the **only borrow pit site being purchased outright** by the State of Florida for the entire Suncoast Parkway;
- FDOT previously **sold off leftover sand from Phase 2**. When asked why, Project Manager **Anil Sharma** replied the surplus was “only 1/10 of the sand needed” for Phase 3A — but residents ask:
Why sell surplus sand, only to pursue a high-risk acquisition in secret?

These facts confirm a **clear break from standard practices** and suggest a **politically motivated rush** toward acquiring the Southworth site — despite overwhelming environmental and fiscal concerns.

Conclusion

FDOT should not proceed with acquisition of the Southworth site. The property lies within an **Outstanding Florida Spring Priority Focus Area** where excavation poses **permanent risks to aquifer recharge and spring flow**. Moving forward ignoring these protections not only violates Florida law but also **undermines the very purpose of the state’s spring protection program**, undoing decades of restoration work and millions in public funding already invested to protect Kings Bay.

FDOT and FTE must halt the acquisition and begin a transparent reassessment process that honors Florida law, protects our water, and respects public trust.

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Disclaimer: Statements attributed to advocates and residents reflect their opinions based on FDOT’s own publicly available records and TestLab reports.

