

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

ACTION ALERT – SPEAK UP FOR OUR WATER THIS WEEK
Forever Nature Coast Workshops – Feb. 3, 4 & 5 (6:00–7:30 PM)

- **Tuesday, Feb. 3** – Citrus Springs Community Center
- **Wednesday, Feb. 4** – Citrus County Chamber of Commerce / Crystal River Visitor Center
- **Thursday, Feb. 5** – Lecanto Government Building
- If you can't attend in person, an online option will also be available soon so your voice can still be counted

We apologize for the short notice, but there is an important opportunity **tonight, tomorrow, and Thursday** for residents to speak directly about **water protection, aquifer recharge, and land conservation** in Citrus County.

This week, the **North Florida Land Trust (NFLT)** is holding public workshops as part of the *Forever Nature Coast* conservation planning effort. These meetings are designed specifically to hear from residents about what should be protected for future generations, and **people across Citrus County have already identified protection of drinking water and aquifer recharge areas as the single most important priority.**

This is not speculation.

In Phase One of the study, residents, local experts, and stakeholders overwhelmingly ranked **protecting drinking water and aquifer recharge areas** above all other conservation priorities.

The full Board of County Commissioners need to hear clearly and directly from residents that **water protection must guide land-use decisions**, especially now.

Why this matters right now

Citrus County is currently under a **Phase I water shortage**, and residents are being asked to conserve. Most of us are already doing our part, watering less, fixing irrigation systems, and avoiding waste.

But conservation cannot be the only strategy while County leadership continues to approve **land-use changes, rezonings, and infrastructure projects** that increase water demand and disrupt groundwater systems.

From the very beginning of the Southworth sand mine proposal, **construction timelines and fill needs, not aquifer protection, framed the discussion**. Commissioner Kinnard raised concerns about highway construction delays tied to fill availability *before the mine was ever heard*, signaling that infrastructure schedules were driving the conversation, not groundwater protection.

At the same time, construction of the **Suncoast Parkway** is already altering surface and groundwater flow across large areas of western Citrus County. Deep excavation below the water table, large stormwater ponds, and extensive soil disturbance in **karst terrain** (land with underground limestone, voids, and sinkhole risk) are not neutral activities. You cannot change that much landscape, disturb or remove more than 70 acres of wetlands (3A & 3B), and expect no effect on groundwater levels, recharge, or springs.

We are also seeing proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan and expansion of industrial areas, including the Holder Industrial Park, that could allow **high-intensity uses with little future public oversight**. Even when facilities claim “low water use,” large-scale industrial development still poses risks from construction disturbance, stormwater runoff, chemical storage, backup power systems, and long-term infrastructure demand.

Meanwhile, residents are being told to conserve every drop.

That imbalance is not acceptable.

What we are already seeing on the ground

Recent observations raise additional concern. A wetland located in the middle of the proposed sand mine site held standing water and healthy vegetation in September 2025 indicating the wetland was being supported by groundwater, not just rainwater, during one of the driest months of the year. By late January 2026, that same wetland was essentially completely dry.

Rainfall data confirms that conditions remained **below normal from fall 2025 into January 2026**, consistent with regional drought trends. However, drought alone does not fully explain the **speed and extent of drying** observed here, especially given that this wetland previously held water during dry conditions.

During this same period, nearby construction activities included **deep excavation that encountered groundwater**, along with ongoing site operations. Residents have observed large tanker trucks drawing water from a newly installed well at the site just

below the excavation incident and adjacent to the proposed Southworth mine site, reportedly for dust control.

Wetlands are living indicators of groundwater health, and a rapid change like this is a **warning that should not be ignored**.

Why the County Board carries responsibility

Citrus County is part of a **Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP)** area. A BMAP is a **state-mandated program** that requires local governments to protect spring flows, reduce pollution, and safeguard groundwater resources.

These are not optional goals, they are legal obligations under Florida law our County Board must follow because groundwater is the primary source of **drinking water for residents on private wells and public systems**, making aquifer protection a direct public-health responsibility.

The **Board of County Commissioners** plays a direct role in meeting those obligations through land-use decisions, zoning, infrastructure approvals, and development policies. Asking residents to conserve water while continuing to approve projects that strain the aquifer **undermines both public trust and the effectiveness of BMAP protections**.

Why the Land Trust matters to our cause

The North Florida Land Trust has the ability to:

- Identify **priority conservation areas**
- Highlight **vulnerable recharge zones**

- Shape long-term land protection strategies
- Inform future funding and acquisition decisions

This process can either help protect our aquifer, or quietly allow critical recharge areas to remain unprotected. **Public participation right now matters.**

What to say if you attend

You don't need to be an expert. Simple, clear messages are powerful:

- Water conservation cannot substitute for responsible land-use planning. Residents should not bear the burden while policies continue to strain the aquifer.
- Groundwater and wetlands are already showing signs of stress. Rapid wetland drying and excavation incidents should trigger caution, not expansion.
- Major projects in high-recharge spring areas deserve full environmental scrutiny. Bypassing stronger federal-style water review (such as Clean Water Act Section 404 analysis) through regulatory shortcuts undermines public trust.
- Citrus County is a BMAP area with legal obligations to protect spring flows and reduce pollution, those obligations must guide decisions.

- Our economy depends on clean water. Springs, rivers, fishing, paddling, and manatee tourism are not compatible with unchecked groundwater disruption.
- It is cheaper and safer to protect water now than to fix damage later

Please consider attending, tonight, tomorrow, or Thursday and encourage friends and neighbors to come as well. Showing up even briefly, sends a strong message when it's focused and informed.

Thank you for standing up for our water, our springs, and our community.

Our water is not just a utility issue. It is a public-health issue, an economic issue, and a land-use responsibility we owe to future generations.

Stop the Sand Mine Committee

Colleen Farmer Chair & Tony Ayo Co-Chair