

BREAKING: Divisive Southern Utah Sand Mine Project Will Not Move Forward

By [David Fuchs](#) • Jan 9, 2020



KANAB — A proposed frac sand mine that sparked controversy here over its use of water and other environmental damage will not move forward.

[Southern Red Sands](#), which is backed by Salt Lake City-based real estate developer Gardner Company, said in a statement on Thursday that it is stepping away from its

business ventures in Kane County, citing the conclusions of "feasibility assessments." The statement did not provide more detail as to what those evaluations revealed.

The announcement was released in conjunction with Best Friends Animal Society, a national animal shelter organization headquartered in Kanab and one of the mining company's most vocal opponents.

The animal society — which is also the county's largest employer — shares a border with the outer limits of Southern Red Sands' mining claims. Best Friends CEO Julie Castle described a potential drawdown on the aquifer caused by the mine as an "existential threat" to its operations in a September interview with KUER.

The company and animal rescue group will work together over the coming months to create a solution that would "preserve the [site's] land, water and wildlife habitat and to sustain Best Friends Animal Society's Sanctuary," according to the statement. The two added that they will work together with the community "to ensure continued benefit as things move forward."

The agreement comes after [months of tension](#) among Kane County residents, which has been on full display since local officials voted in July to sell water to the company at a [contentious Kanab City Council meeting](#).

"It's too bad because we could have used the funds," said Mike Noel, the executive director of the Kane County Water Conservancy District, which also had a water service agreement with Southern Red Sands. "I honestly believe in my heart of hearts that [the mine] would have had a very minimal effect on the water, and with the amount of jobs it would bring, I think it would have been a good thing."

Southern Red Sands planned to mine and process 700,000 tons of sand each year to sell to hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, operations in the Uintah Basin in northeast Utah. Its operations would have begun on 40 acres of land owned by the Utah School and Institutional Trust Land Administration, according to county records. Located roughly 11 miles north of Kanab, the parcel is managed as private property belonging to the state to generate revenue for education and is not subject to environmental regulations that exist for other public lands.

Southern Red Sands CEO Chad Staheli has said the company held mining claims on the surrounding 13,000 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Through its two water service agreements, the company had also purchased 1,200 acre-feet of water per year. That amount is three times what was needed to produce their expected output, which [worried some residents](#) that the mine could potentially expand its operations beyond its

initial scope.

Those opposed to the mine pointed to concerns that the mining operation could overtax the city's aquifer, lead to a rise in truck traffic and air pollution, mar the landscape and deter tourism.

The mine's supporters focused on the 40 direct jobs the company said the mine would bring to the area. They also called on local residents to trust state regulatory agencies, like the divisions of Water Rights and Air Quality, to place sufficient constraints and mitigation requirements on the operation.

Kane County residents also raised questions about potential conflicts of interest between the company and local government.

Southern Red Sands has two full-time employees, one of whom is Andy Gant, a Kane County commissioner. Gant raised some eyebrows when it came to light that when he was still a candidate for office, he allegedly told members of the country's resource development committee that [Mitt Romney was an investor in the project](#).

Gant later denied this and Kem Gardner, the chairman of his namesake company, said his long-time friend was not involved, which a Romney spokeswoman confirmed.

The Gardner Company also faced direct direct pressure. An [online petition](#) calling on the company to step away from the project gathered over 12,000 signatures.

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