

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2026

Contacts: Keiko Mertz, Friends of the River, 916-539-3724
Meghan Quinn, American Rivers, 530-539-5530

Conservation Groups and Tribes Request Release of Overdue State Report on 2022 Merced River Drying

Sacramento, CA – Friends of the River, American Rivers, Big Sandy Rancheria, and the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation have formally requested that the State Water Resources Control Board immediately release its long-promised analysis of the 2022 Merced River drying event.

In a [February 24, 2026 letter](#) to State Water Board Chair Joaquin Esquivel, the coalition called on the Board to finalize and publish its report examining how approximately four miles of the lower Merced River went completely dry, from bank-to-bank, for nearly four months in the summer and early fall of 2022.

The Board publicly committed in January 2024 to complete and release an analysis of the event for public review sometime in 2024. As of early 2026, no report has been made available.

“A major California river ran completely dry for months,” said Keiko Mertz, Policy Director of Friends of the River. “The public deserves to know exactly what happened, why it happened, and what the State plans to do to prevent it from happening again.”

The 2022 dewatering event drew national attention after a [January 2024 New York Times investigation](#) reported that the river likely dried as a result of legal water diversions during drought conditions

State officials acknowledged at the time that senior water rights holders had continued diverting water under California’s priority system, even as the lower riverbed turned to dust.

The drying severed fish passage, stranded aquatic species, and eliminated critical habitat for threatened Central Valley steelhead and Chinook salmon. Federal and state wildlife agencies urged the Board in late 2022 and early 2023 to investigate the causes and adopt protective dry-season baseflow requirements. Conservation groups echoed those calls throughout 2023 and 2024.

Despite repeated agency recommendations and sustained public interest, the Board has not adopted interim flow requirements or permanent regulations to prevent recurrence. Nor has it released the promised analysis of the 2022 event.

“Transparency is foundational to good water governance,” said Meghan Quinn, a director at American Rivers. “The Merced River is not just a water supply. It is a living river with cultural, and ecological values. We need clarity and accountability.”

The groups are urging the Water Board to fulfill its stated commitment and release the analysis without further delay, and to take proactive steps to ensure that no California river is allowed to run dry again due to gaps in water rights administration.

Founded in 1973, Friends of the River works to protect and restore California's rivers and advocate for sustainable, climate-resilient water management.

###