



2

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

THREAT: Gravel mining

STATES: California

SUMMARY

The San Joaquin River, the primary water source for over 30 million Californians and nearly half of California's \$61 billion agricultural economy, and a lifeline for endangered salmon, is threatened by a massive gravel mine. If approved, this project would stall completion of the San Joaquin River Parkway, undercutting millions of dollars in investment in restoration and public recreation access. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors and the county planning commission must reject the mining proposal to protect the San Joaquin River for all who depend on it.

DANIEL NYLEN

THE RIVER

Originating in the Sierra Nevada, the San Joaquin River historically sustained tule elk, bald eagles, grizzly bears, and countless chinook salmon. While urbanization and agriculture have drastically diminished the river, it remains the primary source of water for communities, farms, and endangered ecosystems for 285 miles, from Bakersfield to the Bay Area.

The Yokuts, Mono, Miwok, and Ohlone Nations have cared for and held the river sacred since time immemorial. Historically and to this day, California has the largest Native American population in the country. In the Central Valley, the San Joaquin River enabled such large communities to live in abundance. Their lives, and the lives of millions of Californians that now reside here, depend on the sustenance the river provides.

The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, a nonprofit land trust established in 1988 to create a 33-mile greenway along the San Joaquin River, leads the current effort to protect the river. To date, the Trust has permanently protected over 4,100 acres of the planned 6,500 acres of the Parkway. Once completed, the Parkway will feature a 22-mile multi-use trail, ecological reserves, a restored riparian corridor, and equitable public access.

Over the past 35 years more than \$125 million of public and private funds have been invested in the Parkway through land acquisition, habitat restoration, trails, and other public use projects. In 1992, the state of California enacted the San Joaquin River Conservancy Act, committing the state to preserving the river "for the enjoyment of[...]present and future generations." In 2006, a coalition of environmental organizations, the Friant Water Users Authority, and the Bureau of Reclamation created the San Joaquin River Restoration Program, an effort to restore Chinook salmon populations while avoiding ensuring intact water supply. The return of 448 salmon in 2025 ranks among the program's many successes.

2

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TAKE ACTION:

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SANJOAQUINRIVER2026](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/SANJOAQUINRIVER2026)

DAVID HUNTER

THE THREAT

CEMEX, a global gravel mining company, is pursuing a 100-year permit for a 600-foot-deep blast mine along the San Joaquin River, near the city of Fresno and the San Joaquin River Parkway, threatening river health, the region's drinking water quality, and several endangered species. Of particular concern is the project's potentially drastic impacts on struggling salmon and steelhead trout runs. (For reference, the entire Golden Gate Bridge could fit vertically inside this mine.)

To build the mine, CEMEX proposes to divert water from the

San Joaquin River to the quarry site, exposing the water to hazardous materials. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation points out that CEMEX has no right to this water, and that they have no plan for treating the polluted water before returning it to the river. The depth of the mine and the need to continuously dewater the pit for excavation may have devastating impacts on drainage patterns, river flow, and groundwater recharge – not to mention impacts to recreational use and nature access. Fresno's majority working-class residents of color stand to suffer most from these impacts.

The San Joaquin River has been severely exploited for its gravel and water resources over the past century, to the point that it runs dry for miles in most years. What's more, the Fresno metro area already has nearly 200% more gravel than what is needed for the next 50 years from existing local mines, according to the California Geological Survey. CEMEX's long record of environmental and safety violations demonstrates that the company cannot be relied upon to meet or maintain even the inadequate mitigation measures they have proposed.

If approved, CEMEX's project would forestall the decades-long effort to complete the Parkway by 100 years, as many of the mitigation measures for the project cannot be completed until the end of CEMEX's proposed 100-year permit.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors must reject CEMEX's proposal to expand their operating permit to create a 600-foot-deep blast mine. The Board of Supervisors holds final decision-making power over CEMEX's proposal; however, the Fresno County Planning Commission also plays a key role in approving or rejecting the project. The next opportunity for public input on this decision will be the release of the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project in Spring 2026, including responses to hundreds of comments made by residents during the Draft EIR comment period. At this point, a public hearing will be held before the Fresno County Planning Commission. This will be a crucial chance to make additional comments and advocate against approval of this project. If the project is not stopped in this phase, it will go before the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, which will be the last opportunity to convince the Board to reject the project.