



GRADUATE students have counted more than 3,000 fish lost to the Kern River's collapse, which came as a shock to Bakersfield residents.

Kern River dries, leaving dead fish

Over the last three weeks, ecologist Rae McNeish and her students have watched as a flowing river has abruptly dwindled to a dry riverbed. While conducting biological surveys along the Kern River in Bakersfield, they have seen water retreat into stagnant pools and then vanish, leaving stretches of bare sand and cracked mud. They have found some fish flopping helplessly along the banks, and masses of dead fish scattered on the riverbed by the hundreds. "We're all very surprised at how quickly things changed," said McNeish, an associate professor of biology at Cal State Bakersfield. "It's really sad to see."

The sudden loss of the river has come as a shock in Bakersfield, where residents had grown accustomed to seeing water flowing past parks and beneath bridges after two wet winters. Some compared the rapid desiccation to the effect of turning off a giant faucet.

The collapse follows an appeals court ruling that cleared the way for city officials and water managers to reduce flows upstream, keeping some water behind a dam and sending other supplies to farms. The shutoff of water has dismayed and angered environmental activists, who have argued in court that chronic overallocation and a rigid water-rights framework have caused profound harm to

A sudden shutoff of water flow leads to desiccation in Bakersfield and an investigation by state wildlife officials

By Ian James
Reporting from Bakersfield, Calif.



"IT'S EVAPORATING so quickly," ecologist Rae McNeish of Cal State Bakersfield said of the disappearing river.

the river and its wildlife. McNeish and a group of graduate students have been documenting their observations of the disappearing river, and have counted more than 3,000 dead fish. California wildlife officials are now investigating whether the drying of the river constitutes a violation of state law. "It's evaporating so quickly," McNeish said one morning last week as she walked the riverbed toward two stagnant ponds. A stench of decay drifted in the air. Dead fish lay scattered on the sand, drying in the sun among buzzing flies. McNeish, who has examined the fish carcasses since late August, has identified non-native species including bass, sunfish, bullhead catfish and mosquitofish. She and her students have also found native Sacramento suckers. "These are some of the biggest ones I've seen," graduate student Alexandra Brown said as she approached several dead fish. She stopped and took a picture of a nearly 2-foot-long carp, which lay glistening by the edge of a stagnant pool. The murky water was filled with the dark shapes of other fish that were swimming slowly, with nowhere to go. Brown, who grew up in Bakersfield, said it has been disheartening and frustrating to see so many fish

Fed's rate cut is larger than usual

Half-point drop will aid the economy but could take months to trickle to consumers, analysts caution.

By Don Lee

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve on Wednesday slashed interest rates by an unusually large one-half of a percentage point and signaled that further cuts are on the way for households struggling with still-elevated prices and a generally slowing economy. It was the first rate cut since 2020 and reflected a shift in policymakers' primary focus from fighting inflation to preventing the labor market from deteriorating. While inflation has come down, job growth has slowed significantly in recent months. And the U.S. unemployment rate has risen from 3.7% at the start of the year to a still historically low level of 4.2%. California's most recent unemployment figure is a full percent higher. "This recalibration of our policy stance will help maintain the strength of the economy and the labor market, and will continue to enable further progress on inflation," Fed Chair Jerome H. Powell said at a news conference after the conclusion of policymakers' two-day meeting Wednesday. Stocks had been trading higher in recent days and initially climbed upon news of the Fed's aggressive rate cut, but then gave up the gains to finish moderately down Wednesday. Although lower interest rates will ultimately help with many transactions

Mortgage relief for homebuyers?

Interest rates have fallen, a boon for borrowers. But there's a potential downside. **BUSINESS, A6**



RAP MOGUL Sean "Diddy" Combs "used his business and employees of that business and other close associates to get his way," a federal prosecutor said.

Combs' associates may face pressure to testify as sex crimes case unfolds

By Salvador Hernandez

Sean "Diddy" Combs was the only defendant indicted this week in a sweeping sex trafficking and racketeering investigation. But federal prosecutors made clear that they do not believe he was the only one

responsible.

The 14-page indictment against Combs accuses the founder of Bad Boy Entertainment of luring female victims and using violence, coercion and drugs to get women to take part in "freak offs" — elaborate sex performances that often were recorded and sometimes lasted days.

The case alleges an extensive network, a complicated scheme that would have required multiple people to not just know but be involved to recruit victims, organize the freak offs, clean up and cover the tracks so law enforcement would not get involved. "Combs did not do this all

[See **Combs**, A7]

Trump's incendiary rhetoric has become a double-edged sword

Both sides of the spectrum have radical elements that see political violence as justified, expert says.

By Noah Bierman

WASHINGTON — Robert A. Pape, a political scientist who studies political violence, has little doubt that former President Trump has made more incendiary comments than Vice President Kamala Harris.

The problem, however, is what his research tells him: Both sides of the political spectrum have radical elements that see violence as justified if it means stopping Trump from gaining power (10% of adults) or making sure Trump returns to the White House (7%). Together, they account for millions of people, he estimates. And more of them

on both sides have been incited by rhetoric to act in recent years, whether it's the two apparent assassination attempts on Trump, the hammer attack on then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, Paul, that sent him to the hospital, or any number of events that have lasted only a day in the headlines.

"We don't have a meter that tells you three incendiary statements are OK but 10 is what triggers support for violence," said Pape, a University of Chicago professor who conducts studies every few months on people's attitudes toward political violence. "Doing counts of how many times does Trump say something outrageous versus how many times the Democrats say something outrageous is actually meaningless."

That dynamic has created a frustrating dilemma for Democrats and other Trump critics who see his attacks on Democrats' rhetoric

[See **Rhetoric**, A5]

Pager explosions motive a mystery

A second day of blasts in Lebanon blamed on Israel only adds to the question: How would it benefit? **WORLD, A3**

Insurance crisis in foster system

Youths could be uprooted as major carrier phases out coverage, citing costly abuse claims. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Sparks' owners miss moment

WNBA team's woes are the fault of a group that doesn't seem to care, Bill Plaschke writes. **SPORTS, B10**

Weather
Clouds clearing.
L.A. Basin: 76/61. **B6**

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