

USMCA–Tijuana River Pollution Crisis Campaign

Impact Report

WILDCOAST/COSTASALVAJE & Sierra Club San Diego Chapter

August 17, 2026

58 confirmed media placements across Mexico and the United States, with approximately 65 million in cumulative potential audience reach.

The campaign elevated the Tijuana River pollution crisis from a regional environmental emergency into a binational debate over trade, public health, infrastructure, and environmental accountability.



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Executive Summary

The USMCA-TRV campaign led by WILDCOAST/COSTASALVAJE and the Sierra Club San Diego Chapter, launched on July 5th, 2026 with an op-ed in the San Diego Union Tribune and culminated with press conference in Tijuana on July 9th and a San Diego press conference on July 16th, successfully elevating a decades-long cross-border sewage crisis from a primarily local environmental issue into a binational policy discussion with direct implications for trade, public health, environmental protection, infrastructure investment, and regional economic competitiveness. This campaign is still ongoing, as we are working with the national Sierra Club lobbyists, who are meeting with trade representatives from both countries and members of Congress to rally support for enforceable environmental standards and a rapid-response mechanism. By linking the crisis to the upcoming review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA/T-MEC), the campaign created a clear and timely public narrative: the benefits of North American trade should be accompanied by enforceable environmental responsibility.

Across television, digital media, newspapers, radio, and social platforms, the campaign generated 58 confirmed media placements in Mexico and the United States. Based on the audience estimates contained in the monitoring data, those placements represent approximately 65 million in cumulative potential audience reach. Because these figures are outlet-level estimates and audiences overlap, they should not be interpreted as confirmed article views or unique individuals reached.

58	~65M	32	7
Confirmed placements	Cumulative potential audience	Mexico placements	U.S. press placements

Campaign Objective and Core Message

The campaign was designed to connect the Tijuana River pollution crisis to the 2026 USMCA/T-MEC review and to make environmental enforcement a central part of the trade discussion. The core message called for legally binding environmental protections, clear accountability for the obligated parties, sustained funding for infrastructure and operations, and durable solutions to cross-border pollution.

“With U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer acknowledging the administration’s intent to address the agreement’s shortcomings before any extension, we call on negotiators to include legally binding environmental protections, clear accountability for all obligated parties, and long-term solutions to the ongoing Tijuana River pollution crisis, ensuring that free trade and economic stewardship advance together.”

— Serge Dedina, Charles Rilli, and Rosario Norzagaray

July 5, 2026, Op-Ed in the [San Diego Union Tribune](#)

Opinion: Trade deal renewal must include Tijuana sewage fix



A sign warns of sewage and chemical contaminated water along a beach Tuesday, March 10, 2026, in Coronado, Calif. (OP Photo/Diego Ruiz)

By SERGE DEDINA, CHARLES RILLI and ROSARIO NORZAGARAY
PUBLISHED July 5, 2026 at 11:57 AM PDT | UPDATED July 6, 2026 at 11:20 AM PDT

Overall Media Results

Media type	Placements
Television and video coverage	8
Digital media articles	28
Print newspapers	4
Radio interviews	1
Social media posts	17
Total confirmed placements	58

Audience estimate: Approximately 65 million in cumulative potential audience reach across traditional and digital media. This is a measure of potential exposure, not duplicated reach or verified views.

Mexico Media Impact

A July 9, 2026 press conference in Tijuana, Mexico, produced 32 media placements and delivered the campaign’s strongest expansion in scale and political relevance. Coverage moved rapidly from local and regional Baja California reporting into major national Mexican outlets, shifting the story from a Tijuana-specific environmental problem into a broader discussion about the future of the USMCA/T-MEC and Mexico’s environmental responsibilities within the North American trade relationship.

This press conference was joined by WILDCOAST, Sierra Club San Diego, 4 Walls Int, Pronatura Noroeste, CostaSalvaje, and the Tijuana River Coalition.



July 9, 2026 press conference in Tijuana. Serge Dedina (Executive Director of WILDCOAST/ COSTASALVAJE), Valeria Towns (Conservation Director of Pronatura), Ramon Chairez (Tijuana River Advocate/ 4 Walls Int), Charles Rilli (Deputy Director, Sierra Club San Diego), Rosario Norzagaray (Costasalvaje), Fay Crevoshay (Communications & Policy Director, WILDCOAST), and members of the Tijuana River Coalition.

National Reach and Message Penetration in Mexico

Early regional reporting consistently carried the campaign's core ask: place the Tijuana River pollution crisis on the USMCA/T-MEC negotiating agenda, require measurable environmental commitments, and secure long-term funding for infrastructure and operations. In several cases, the policy demand itself became the headline, demonstrating strong message penetration rather than incidental coverage.

- **Nationalization of the issue.** Coverage expanded from Tijuana and Baja California to major national outlets including Excelsior, Imagen TV, UnoTV/Uno Noticias, and El Imparcial/Frontera.
- **Strong T-MEC message penetration.** A substantial share of headlines explicitly connected Tijuana River pollution to the upcoming trade-agreement review, ensuring that audiences encountered the campaign's proposed policy solution alongside the environmental problem.
- **Escalation from commitments to accountability.** Later reporting increasingly focused on the possibility of sanctions, fines, or other consequences tied to cross-border pollution, increasing the economic and diplomatic stakes of the issue.
- **Regional saturation supported national pickup.** Extensive coverage across Baja California outlets created sustained local momentum that helped carry the story into national news markets.
- **Binational framing reduced a blame-only narrative.** Much of the early coverage emphasized shared watershed impacts, coalition advocacy, and responsibilities on both sides of the border, strengthening the case for enforceable binational solutions.
- **National visibility created political leverage.** By connecting wastewater failures to the T-MEC - one of Mexico's most important economic relationships - the campaign made the issue harder to dismiss as a localized complaint.



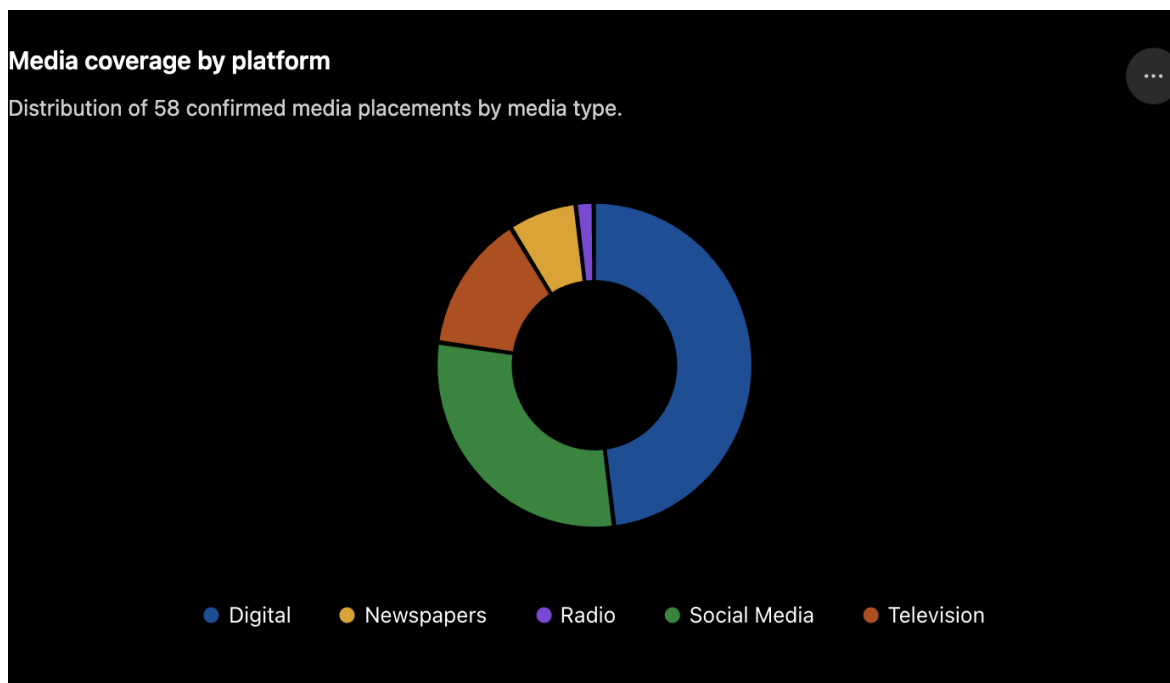
An important aspect of Mexican press coverage was documenting the public health impact of the pollution crisis in San Diego. The reporting of Ernesto Mendez, Mexico's top environmental journalist,

reached over 21 million people in Mexico via Excélsior (image at top) and Imagen TV. This photo is of the Saturn Avenue pollution hotspot in the Tijuana River Valley. *Photo: Ernesto Mendez.*

Leading Mexican National Media Outlets by Estimated Audience

Outlet	Estimated audience	Market
Excélsior	~12.1M	National
Imagen TV	~9.4M	National television
El Imparcial/Frontera	~6.8M	National/regional
UnoTV Noticias	~3.5M	National digital
Uno Noticias	~3.0M	National
N+ Noticias Baja California / Canal 12	~2.7M	Regional television
TV Azteca Baja California	~950K	Regional television
CNR Noticias	~785K	Regional
Uniradio	~710K	Regional
El Mexicano	~703K	Regional
Cadena Noticias	~700K	Regional
Punto Norte	~650K	Regional
ZETA	~600K	Regional
TJ Noticias	~472K	Regional
Síntesis TV	~453K	Regional television

Note: Audience values are approximate outlet-level estimates from the media monitoring data and should be used as indicators of potential exposure, not verified views of individual stories.



Political Impact in Mexico

The Mexico-side media campaign generated evidence of political and institutional attention beyond news coverage itself. The issue reached federal officials, regulatory agencies, and the courts, while public discussion increasingly focused on implementation, infrastructure, and accountability.

Federal Government Response

On July 30, 2026, Mexico's Environment Secretary (SEMARNAT) Alicia Bárcena addressed the Tijuana River pollution crisis during President Claudia Sheinbaum's morning press conference. Bárcena stated that the Mexican government remained committed to cleaning the river from its source to the Pacific Ocean, highlighted wastewater infrastructure investments, and described the challenge as a binational responsibility requiring action by both countries. The significance was less in the existence of prior commitments than in the fact that the issue was being addressed publicly at the highest level of Mexico's federal government.

Government Attention and Media Independence

Following coverage calling for Tijuana-San Diego pollution to be included in the USMCA/T-MEC review, the campaign received information that SEMARNAT communications staff contacted media outlets about the reporting. According to the source material, the outlets declined to remove the stories and emphasized the need for tangible results and measurable progress. If cited externally, this point should be attributed carefully because it is based on information received by the campaign rather than a public agency statement.

Infrastructure and Judicial Developments

Federal officials also highlighted a package of eight projects under Mexico's Tijuana River sanitation strategy, helping move public discussion from recognition of the problem toward identifiable infrastructure actions. Separately, a federal court in Baja California issued an injunction on July 16th, directing CONAGUA and PROFEPA to take measures within their authority to restore and remediate the Tijuana

River channel and strengthen inspection and enforcement. Together, these developments reinforced the campaign’s central argument that commitments must be paired with implementation and accountability.

U.S. Media Impact- Regional Media

The July 16, 2026 press conference in San Diego, California, generated seven identified media placements and established a clear political message: “No pollution fix, no deal.” Coverage linked the Tijuana River crisis directly to USMCA renewal and reinforced the campaign’s demand for enforceable, measurable environmental protections rather than additional voluntary commitments. California State Assemblymember David Alvarez and San Diego County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre joined the Sierra Club San Diego Chapter, WILDCOAST, 4 Walls Int, Surfrider Foundation, Protect Otay Foothills, and the Tijuana River Coalition. Representatives from multiple Congressional offices of the San Diego delegation were also in attendance.



July 16, 2026 press conference in San Diego. Alicia Kelley (Sierra Club San Diego, South Bay Task Force), Charles Rilli (Deputy Director, Sierra Club San Diego), Ramon Chairez (Tijuana River Advocate, 4 Walls Int), Sarah Davidson (Surfrider Foundation, Clean Border Water Now), California State Assemblymember David Alvarez, San Diego County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre, Courtney Baltiyskyy (Tijuana River Coalition co-lead), Serge Dedina (Executive Director of WILDCOAST), Tiffany Curry (Outdoor Outreach), Waylon Matson (4 Walls International), Stephanie Peck (Protect Otay Foothills)

NEWS • News

No pollution fix, no deal: Officials warn renewal of international trade pact must be tied to solving crisis

Assemblymember David Alvarez, Supervisor Paloma Aguirre and coalition of environmental groups say extension of agreement must include binding, enforceable protections for the Tijuana River watershed

Estimated U.S. Regional Outlet Reach

Outlet	Estimated potential audience
San Diego Union-Tribune	~1.5M
Times of San Diego	~650K

Outlet	Estimated potential audience
KPBS	~600K
Coronado News	110K+
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin	~100K
CALÓ News	~25K
Navarro Report	~5K

Key Messages Amplified by U.S. Coverage

- **The Tijuana River pollution crisis** is a major environmental and public-health emergency along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- **Decades of inadequate wastewater infrastructure** continue to harm communities, beaches, ecosystems, and regional economies.
- **The USMCA review** offers a timely opportunity to strengthen environmental enforcement and binational cooperation.
- **Trade benefits** should not be separated from responsibility for cross-border environmental harm.
- **Permanent infrastructure, operations, and maintenance funding** is necessary to make cleanup commitments durable.

U.S. Political Impact

The U.S. press conference helped move the Tijuana River crisis beyond a regional infrastructure debate and into the national discussion over trade policy, federal environmental enforcement, and U.S.-Mexico diplomacy. Its political significance came from the alignment of environmental organizations with local, state, and federal elected officials around a common negotiating demand.

Four Major Political Outcomes

1. Press Conference messaging led to the entire San Diego U.S. Congressional delegation- **U.S. Representatives Scott Peters, Juan Vargas, Mike Levin, and Sara Jacobs- on July 24, 2026, to call for no USMCA extension** without enforceable standards, a river diversion project, funding for infrastructure, and a solution to the Tijuana River pollution crisis. This press release reinforced our coalition's demands 8 days after our U.S. press conference.
2. Established a clear negotiating demand: USMCA renewal or extension should include meaningful action on the Tijuana River pollution crisis and stronger environmental protections.
2. Built alignment across levels of government: California State Assemblymember David Alvarez and San Diego County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre publicly advanced the demand, **followed by U.S. Representatives Scott Peters, Juan Vargas, Mike Levin, and Sara Jacobs pressing for** enforceable standards and additional commitments.
3. Shifted the policy framework from promises to accountability: the campaign emphasized enforceable standards, rapid-response mechanisms, permanent funding, monitoring, and long-term infrastructure obligations.

4. Elevated an environmental-justice and public-health crisis into a national and international policy arena by connecting conditions in the Tijuana River Valley to negotiations governing the broader North American economic relationship.

San Diego Congressional Delegation Call For Action On Transboundary Sewage Crisis In Renewed Trade Negotiations

July 24, 2026

Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Scott Peters (CA-50) led his colleagues Reps. Juan Vargas (CA-52), Mike Levin (CA-49), and Sara Jacobs (CA-51) in a letter to Ambassador Jamieson Greer to highlight the continued urgency and need for cooperation with Mexico to address the Tijuana River Valley environmental crisis. The renegotiation of the United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) must move forward and be utilized as an opportunity to secure additional funding and bi-national commitments to prevent further health and environmental impacts from cross-border sewage pollution in the Tijuana River Valley.

The USMCA has been pivotal for San Diego, a city long plagued by cross-border pollution and chronic sewage spills largely caused by Mexico's failing infrastructure, which threatens our beaches, public health, and local economy. President Trump's

San Diego Congressional delegation press release eight days after U.S. press conference, reinforcing the campaign demands that any USMCA extension must include binding solutions to the Tijuana River pollution crisis.

“The United States must develop enforceable environmental standards and a rapid response mechanism for violations of the minute treaties and wastewater spills that can and should be avoided with every possible measure available.” - [San Diego Congressional Delegation](#)

U.S. Congressional Delegation Reinforces the Demand

- The campaign's political impact was strengthened when members of San Diego's congressional delegation subsequently advanced many of the same demands directly to U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.
- On July 24, 2026, Representatives Scott Peters, Juan Vargas, Mike Levin, and Sara Jacobs called for the renewed USMCA negotiations to secure additional funding and binational commitments to address the Tijuana River pollution crisis. Their letter specifically called for the United States to develop enforceable environmental standards and a rapid-response mechanism for environmental violations and avoidable wastewater spills.
- Together, the positions of Assemblymember David Alvarez, Supervisor Paloma Aguirre, Rep. Scott Peters, Rep. Mike Levin, Rep. Sara Jacobs, and Rep. Juan Vargas demonstrate significant alignment of local, state, and federal political leadership around using the USMCA process to achieve stronger environmental accountability.
- The congressional proposal also moved beyond general demands for cleanup. Peters, Vargas, Levin, and Jacobs identified concrete federal and binational policy mechanisms, including multi-year Mexican infrastructure commitments, permanent funding for Tijuana River Valley infrastructure, greater flexibility for the North American Development Bank, river-diversion and advanced-treatment projects, and a formalized role for the International Boundary and Water Commission and its Mexican counterpart within the USMCA framework.

Tijuana River Coalition Visibility and Credibility

Media coverage consistently presented the campaign as a broad regional and binational coalition rather than the position of a single organization. Coverage identified WILDCOAST/COSTASALVAJE, Sierra Club San Diego, Surfrider Foundation, Four Walls International, and the Tijuana River Coalition, and also highlighted participation by Assemblymember David Alvarez and San Diego County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre. This coalition framing strengthened the campaign's credibility by showing alignment across conservation, environmental justice, public health, community, and elected leadership.

Strategic Communications Assessment

- **The campaign created a simple, repeatable policy frame** that reporters could use in headlines and summaries: environmental accountability should be part of the USMCA/T-MEC review.
- **Mexico coverage provided the greatest scale** and expanded the issue beyond the border region into a national political and economic context.
- **U.S. coverage reinforced enforceability**, permanent funding, and accountability, while elected-official participation increased policy relevance and news value.
- **Follow-on political responses** suggest the campaign contributed to an ongoing policy narrative rather than a one-day news cycle.
- **The strongest future opportunity** is to maintain a binational frame while continuing to add Mexican and Baja California voices, infrastructure milestones, and measurable accountability benchmarks.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Engage U.S. and Mexican trade representatives to keep environmental enforcement and the Tijuana River crisis central to the USMCA/T-MEC review.
2. Continue coordinated media outreach in both countries, using new angles such as economic competitiveness, national security, public health, free trade, immigration-related infrastructure pressures, and the role of the North American Development Bank.
3. Support advancement of California State Assemblymember Alvarez's joint resolution in the California Legislature.
4. Continue federal advocacy for infrastructure funding and long-term operations and maintenance support.
5. Explore complementary County of San Diego policy and funding strategies, including current ballot-measure opportunities.
6. Maintain the campaign position that new policies for the region should not move forward without a solution to the Tijuana River Pollution Crisis.
7. Working with the San Diego U.S. Congressional Delegation to further advocate for the Tijuana River Pollution Crisis to be front and center
8. Continuing to advocate for new environmental standards in the USMCA agreement and to call for no polluting industries to be built within 3 miles of the border wall or the Tijuana River.

Conclusion

The campaign materially changed the public frame surrounding the Tijuana River pollution crisis. Rather than being discussed only as a recurring local sewage problem, the crisis increasingly appeared in media coverage as a binational challenge with consequences for public health, environmental protection, infrastructure investment, economic competitiveness, and the future of the USMCA/T-MEC.

With 58 confirmed media placements across Mexico and the United States and approximately 65 million in cumulative potential audience reach, the campaign established a strong communications foundation for the next phase of advocacy. Its most important achievement was not simply the volume of coverage, but the successful linkage of cross-border pollution to enforceable trade-related environmental accountability - creating a clearer path from media visibility to policy pressure and governmental action.

Measurement and Reporting Note

This report distinguishes confirmed media placements from estimated audience exposure. Placement counts are based on identified television, digital, print, radio, and social media coverage. Audience figures are based on outlet-level readership, viewership, website traffic, followers, or comparable reach estimates contained in the monitoring data. Because the same people may encounter multiple outlets or stories, cumulative audience figures include overlap and should not be interpreted as unique reach. Article-level pageviews, broadcast impressions, and social-media analytics can only be confirmed by the respective publishers or platforms