



MELANIE WINTER floats along the L.A. River in the Sepulveda Basin. She has spent much of her life advocating for rewilding the river. Photographs by ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

COLUMN ONE

Her vision for a renewed river

As she undergoes cancer treatment, a longtime advocate remains focused on healing L.A.'s relationship to the waterway

BY IAN JAMES

Two canoes and two kayaks glided along, paddles leaving ripples in the still water. Tall cottonwood trees and willows enveloped the riverbanks in cool shade and swallows soared among the branches. White butterflies floated along the water's edge.

"How amazing is this! In the middle of L.A.," exclaimed Melanie Winter, who sat admiring the view from a canoe. "You get a glimpse of what the river was, and what the river could be again."

This oasis, part of the Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area, is one of the few spots where the Los Angeles River isn't straitjacketed in concrete, allowing it to flow unencumbered through a thriving riparian forest.

For Winter, it's a place that shows the potential to solve multiple problems and improve life in Los Angeles by reimagining the city's heavily engineered channels to make space for nature along the river.

For nearly three decades, Winter has been persistently spreading her alternative vision for the river and the watershed — a vision that includes "unbuilding" where feasible, removing concrete and reactivating stretches of natural floodplains where the river can spread out.

Leading her nonprofit the River Project, she has won significant victories but has also encountered resistance from engineers and local officials who prefer traditional hard-infrastructure approaches. For as long as she has been doing this work, Winter says, it has felt like a battle. And now another challenge looms: She has lung cancer.

She was diagnosed in November. [See L.A. River, A7]



A GREAT BLUE heron takes flight from one of the few spots where the Los Angeles River isn't straitjacketed in concrete.

Record payout in clergy abuse cases

The \$880-million settlement brings the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles' total past \$1.5 billion.

BY RICHARD WINTON AND HANNAH FRY

In what could be the closing chapter in a landmark legal battle, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles has agreed to pay \$880 million to victims of clergy sexual abuse dating back decades in the largest settlement involving the Catholic Church.

Attorneys for 1,353 people who allege that they suffered horrific abuse at the hands of local Catholic priests reached the settlement after months of negotiations with the archdiocese. The agreement caps a quarter of a century of litigation against the most populous archdiocese in the United States.

The settlement leaves only a few lawsuits pending against the church in Los Angeles, attorneys for the victims say.

The archdiocese had previously paid \$740 million to victims in various settlements and had pledged to better protect its church members, so this settlement would put the total payout at more than \$1.5 billion.

"These survivors have suffered for decades in the aftermath of the abuse. Dozens of the survivors have died. They are aging, and many of those with knowledge of the abuse within the church are too. It was time to get this resolved," said attorney Morgan Stewart, who led the settlement negotiations.

Attorney Mike Reck of Jeff Anderson & Associates said, "This is a measure of justice. There can never be full justice. These brave survivors brought it to protect kids in the future."

Archbishop José H. Gomez approved the settlement, which will be funded by archdiocese investments, accumulated reserves, bank [See Archdiocese, A12]



ALEX BRANDON Associated Press
ELON MUSK appears at former President Trump's rally in Butler, Pa., on Oct. 5. Two years ago, the tech mogul had said Trump should "sail into the sunset."

The transformation of Elon Musk from Trump doubter to benefactor

BY LAURA J. NELSON AND JAMES RAINEY

While he was building rockets and electric cars and becoming the world's richest man, Elon Musk mostly stayed out of politics, donating relatively modest amounts to candidates from both parties and voting for

Democrats for president, including Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

But Musk's political restraint has vanished over the last two years as the magnate pivoted to using his vast wealth, celebrity and outside online presence to become one of former President Trump's most visible and deep-pocketed champi-

ons. Federal campaign filings made public late Tuesday show that over a three-month period ending Sept. 30, Musk poured almost \$75 million into a new super PAC that has spent more than \$110 million to support Republican candidates. Most of the money has [See Musk, A9]

Wiretapping charges won't be brought in City Hall audio leak

BY JAMES QUEALLY, DAKOTA SMITH AND DAVID ZAHNISER

After the release of a secretly recorded conversation between four Latino political leaders sparked an uproar at City Hall, two overarching questions lingered: Who made the recording and why?

Detectives suspected a married couple, Santos Leon and Karla Vasquez, who worked at the L.A. County Federation of Labor, where the conversation — which was laced with crude and racist remarks — took place in 2021.

But L.A. County prosecutors declined to bring felony charges this year against either Leon or Vasquez, both of whom have denied wrongdoing. And this week, L.A. City Atty. Hydee Feldstein Soto's office announced there was "insufficient evidence" to pursue misdemeanor wiretapping charges.

Although civil suits by two of the participants in the conversation are pending,

the latest development greatly reduces the chances of a trial that would unearth definitive answers about how and why the scandal was set into motion.

The audio was leaked on social media and then reported by The Times in 2022, sparking furious protests in and outside the City Council chamber, at times shutting down meetings. The scandal led to the resignations of City Council President Nury Martinez and Ron Herrera, then head of the labor federation, who were heard on the audio with Councilmembers Gil Cedillo and Kevin de León.

Ivor Pine, a spokesperson for Feldstein Soto, did not say when the decision to not prosecute was made, or elaborate on the office's reasoning. Approached by a reporter outside her office late Tuesday, Feldstein Soto declined comment.

The decision, which was first reported by the Associated Press, was met with praise by Leon's and Vasquez's attorneys.

"Number one, my client [See Audio leak, A9]

Dodgers-Mets Game 3 coverage

Read about Wednesday's NLCS result at latimes.com/sports and in our Playoffs Extra at latimes.com/ewspaper.

Bass calls for faster repairs

Los Angeles mayor overhauls how city departments plan and deliver infrastructure projects. CALIFORNIA, B1

Pay \$400 to skip Disneyland lines

The resort will soon allow a limited number of guests to buy Lightning Lane Premier Passes. BUSINESS, A8

Weather

Mostly cloudy, cool. L.A. Basin: 70/58. B6

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