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'WE HAVE TO ADAPT OR DIE'



KARL MONDON — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Brand Little shows off a modified, half-open-top crab pot at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. He believes the simple redesign could be a solution to the problem of whale entanglement that has been repeatedly delaying crab season openings.

THIS LOW-TECH IDEA IS A REAL CATCH

Two Bay Area crab fishermen have come up with a simple modification of crab pots that could protect whales — and help revitalize a threatened industry

By Roxanne Hoorn
Correspondent

As whale populations swell along the California coast, Dungeness crab fishermen are struggling to stay afloat.

Fear of entangling whales in a minefield of ropes extending from traps on the ocean floor to buoys floating on the surface has forced state regulators to delay the traditional Nov. 15 start of the commercial crabbing season year after year. This year alone it was delayed several times because of the continuing presence of migrating whales. It will finally open Saturday — limited to half the usual number of crab pots.

In response to the dwindling season, crab fishermen and scientists have been working furiously to come up with solutions to the problem.

One new high-tech design being tested bundles the ropes with crab pots so that the ropes pop up to the surface only when triggered by a timer or a sound alert sent from fishing boats so crews can quickly retrieve the pots.

But two veteran Bay Area fishermen, Brand Little and Steve Melz, have also come up with a potential low-tech solution already available in their boatyards.

Arguing that developing expensive gadgetry is overthinking the solution,



JOE FLOWERS — NOAA MARINE MAMMAL HEALTH AND STRANDING RESPONSE PROGRAM

Members of a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration team that rapidly responds to whale entanglements disentangle Dungeness crab gear from a humpback whale in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in 2018.

they've crafted a simple modification of the traditional crab pot that they say could put the nostalgic delicacy back on holiday menus as soon as next year. "We have to adapt or die," Little said.

The duo's redesign is an old-fashioned crab pot with half the top re-

moved, essentially converting it from a trap to a "scoop." Some crabs would be able to crawl out of the top, which Little and Melz say would incentivize fishermen to stay with their traps rather than leaving them unattended for days — lying in wait for whales

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'SOGGY AND BOGGY'

Strong storm may bring flooding

Bay Area is under flood watch through Saturday; shallow landslides possible, forecasters say

By Robert Salonga and Austin Turner
Staff writers

The Bay Area should brace for another soaking today and Saturday with a major storm system settling that is raising flooding and landslide concerns given that the region's soil already absorbed rain from another storm earlier this week.

Both the National Weather Service and U.S. Geological Survey have found that soil saturation is expected to set off a domino effect that leads to an elevated risk of shallow landslides, particularly on Saturday.

"You can't just keep adding water to the soils when the soils are full," said Brian Garcia, a meteorologist at the weather service's station in Monterey. "That becomes runoff, putting more water in rivers, creeks and streams and in the watershed. We're going to see higher rises than what we saw in the last system."

The region got an early glimpse of the coming rains Thursday when residents woke up to wet and rainy conditions following a short respite Wednesday that saw dry and sunny weather for most of the region.

Still, even after a morning of gray skies and scattered showers, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's rainfall survey showed much of the Bay Area got no more than a third of an inch of rain Thursday.

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OAKLAND SCHOOL BOARD RACE

After election error, what comes next for ranked choice voting?

By Shomik Mukherjee
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OAKLAND » The revelation this week of an unprecedented error in Alameda County's counting of election results has upended an Oakland school board race. But more lasting damage could be done to the reputation of ranked choice voting, a novel "instant runoff" format that is growing in popularity around the country.

Mike Hutchinson, the third-place finisher in a race for Oakland Unified's District 4 school board seat, was told by election officials Wednesday that he may actually have won the race due to a technical mistake in how the county's Registrar of Voters tabulated ranked choice results.

The mistake itself involved a simple switch — a feature in the county's election software that was incorrectly turned on, rather than left off. As a result, ballots where a first-choice candidate was missing were incorrectly counted.

"We incorrectly had the software set so that it

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AIR TRAVEL TURMOIL

'Normal' services to resume today, Southwest says

By Eliyahu Kamisher and Harriet Blair Rowan
Staff writers

After canceling thousands of flights and leaving passengers stranded around the country in recent days, Southwest Airlines said it will return to normal operations with "minimal disruptions" starting today in time for New Year's celebrations. How "normal" will look is the big question as the beleaguered airline ramps up, going from canceling nearly 60% of its flights to full-throttle in just one day.

While Southwest projects an end to the current air travel misery, the compa-

ny's reputation is badly battered by a fiasco that could end up costing hundreds of millions of dollars. Many passengers are still scrambling to save what's left of holiday travel plans, and thousands of other passengers are enduring missing luggage and hefty fees for hotel stays, rental cars and flight rebookings.

"We are encouraged by the progress we've made to realign crew, their schedules, and our fleet," Southwest said Thursday in a statement. "With another holiday weekend full of important connections for our valued customers and em-

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ARIC CRABB — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Travelers wait in line at the Southwest Airlines check-in counter in Terminal 2 of Oakland International Airport on Tuesday.

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