

STARTING STRONG

Scott Ostler: Buddy Hield impressive in Warriors debut.

SPORTING GREEN, B1



BRIDGE TOLLS COULD BE RISING

Bay Area drivers could be paying \$8.50 by 2026, up to \$11.50 by 2030.

BAY AREA & BUSINESS, A6



INSIDE 'CONCLAVE'

Ralph Fiennes' role in Vatican drama his meatiest in years.

DATEBOOK, B7

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Wildlife rescuers seek to curb worst outbreak of avian botulism at refuges along California-Oregon border



Photos by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Dom Sterling, left, a contract worker for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, pulls a dead duck from the water early this month at the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge near the California-Oregon border.

Battling to bring life to birds' 'death trap'

By Kurtis Alexander

When the birds touch down, they have no idea of the danger that lurks in the water.

But soon they feel weak. Their eyes may close. They struggle to hold up their wings, then their heads. Eventually, they drown.

Over the past three months, nearly 100,000 birds have died in this vicious sequence that scientists say marks the worst outbreak of avian botulism ever at the Klamath Basin national wildlife refuges, along the California-Oregon border.

The die-off is centered at Tule Lake, an ancient volcanic lake in Siskiyou and Modoc counties. It's one of six federal refuges designed to provide sanctuary for the hundreds of thousands of birds, as well as other animals, that live and visit the



Sterling holds a sick duck he captured. In the past three months, nearly 100,000 birds have died amid an outbreak of avian botulism at refuges in the area.

remote region annually. Among the recent dead are both the local waterfowl, namely ducks, and the many migratory birds that stop for food and rest on their often-long journeys up and down the West Coast.

While botulism occurs

naturally — from bacteria that produce a toxin in warm, shallow water — the scope of the illness points to broader problems facing the Klamath Basin. Foremost are water policies that have long limited supplies for some of the refuges, as well as climate change,

which is partly responsible for producing California's hottest summer on record this year.

"These outbreaks are a symptom of all of the challenges in this watershed," said John Vradenburg, supervisory biologist at the Klamath Basin refuges. "When this ecosystem collapses, birds may be the first to fall off the landscape, but everything else is going to be falling pretty quickly, too."

The recent removal of four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River, to the west, is part of a long-running effort to improve conditions in the basin. But more is needed to address the region's many issues.

The birds began dying midsummer. Initially, Vradenburg and his colleagues at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified both avi-

Birds continues on A9

Voters split on closing Great Highway

Prop K would permanently ban cars from one section

By Ko Lyn Cheang

A contentious November ballot measure to close a 2-mile stretch of San Francisco's Great Highway is very close, according to a new poll commissioned by the Chronicle.

The measure would permanently ban private motor vehicles from a portion of the city's westernmost coastal boulevard between Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard, also known as Upper Great Highway. About 46% of respondents said they would vote yes on Proposition K. Meanwhile, 44% of respondents said they would vote no and 10% said they were not sure. Proposition K needs a simple majority to pass.

This poll, conducted Oct. 15-16 by Sextant Strategies & Research, surveyed 802 likely voters and has a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

Supporters pitch a "transformative" oceanfront park for pedestrians and cyclists while opponents argue closing a major thoroughfare that west side residents depend on would cause dangerous traffic congestion on alternative roads and increase commuting time.

Highway continues on A9

Tahoe worst-case scenario: 11-hour fire evacuation

By Julie Johnson

An evacuation of Tahoe's biggest city, South Lake Tahoe in El Dorado County, in the event of a wildfire could take from 8.5 to 11 hours.

The estimate came from the second half of a study, released Wednesday, estimating evacuation times during worst-case wildfire scenarios in the Lake Tahoe basin — raising concerns the growing popularity of the Sierra Nevada jewel comes with risks.

Commissioned by the nonprofit Tahoe Sierra Clean Air Coalition, the report simulated evacuations along Lake Tahoe's southern half, estimating it could take people four to 11 hours to leave the area, with the longest bottlenecks predicted for people fleeing South Lake Tahoe.

The region experienced widespread evacuations in 2021, when the Caldor Fire ignited

Lake Tahoe continues on A9

Mysterious mogul thriving in wine, sports

By Jess Lander

In June, billionaire Bill Foley — one of the most prolific buyers of California wineries in the past 20 years — told the Chronicle he was done buying wineries.

Just a month later, conglomerate Vintage Wine Estates declared bankruptcy, and Foley jumped at the chance to bid on its assets.

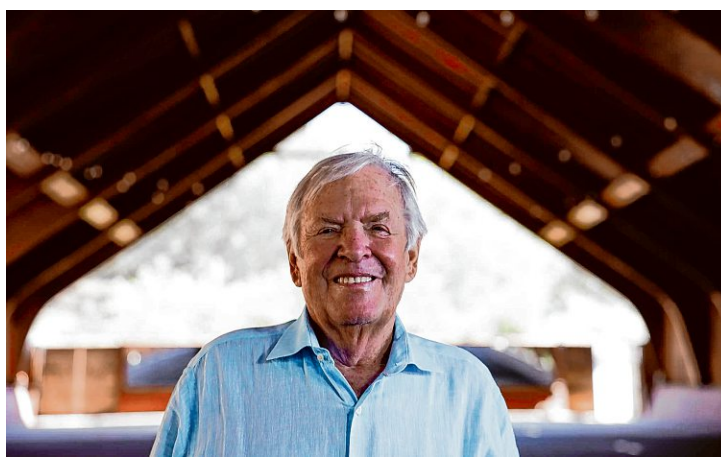
It appears that he simply couldn't resist: Bankruptcy court is exactly the kind of environment where Foley thrives. An expert thrifter, he's known — and often criticized — for scooping up storied yet forlorn wine estates and attempting to restore them to glory with multimillion-dollar renovations and rebrands. Yet while this has earned him a place among industry heavyweights such as Gallo and Con-

stellation, his wine holdings are a mere footnote on the serial entrepreneur's Wikipedia page. Foley, who has a net worth of \$2 billion, according to Forbes, is best known for his sports dealings. To the wine world, he remains largely a mystery.

He leaves most public-facing matters to his daughter and probable successor, Courtney Foley, while he spends the majority of his time at his home in Las Vegas, the headquarters of his National Hockey League team, the Golden Knights. When he's not in Vegas, Foley is at one of his other homes in Healdsburg, Montana or overseas. "People don't really know him," said Bill Price, a lawyer turned Sonoma County vintner.

Foley has amassed roughly 20 wineries throughout California.

Foley continues on A10



Lea Suzuki/The Chronicle

Sports mogul Bill Foley is one of the biggest names in California wine, but he's a mystery to the wine world.

"I try to buy wineries that have an identity. I try to improve that and make them better."

Bill Foley, wine and sports entrepreneur

