

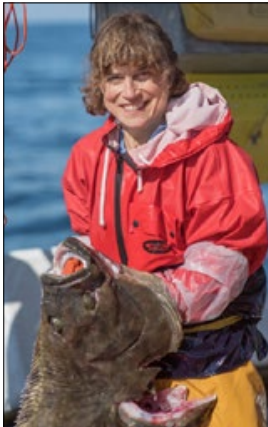


PROFILE

Linda Behnken : A leader, a fisher, a mother and a strong advocate of sustainable fisheries, she occupies a unique and significant place in the world of fisheries

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Linda Behnken

Linda came to Alaska in 1982 after her first year of college with a love of wilderness and vague ideas of earning money for college by working on commercial fishing boats. She landed her first job when a deckhand failed to show up after a night of drinking, and the skipper hesitantly agreed to give her a chance. On that first trip Linda was hooked. She loved

fish. In 1991 she bought her own boat, which she owned and operated until marriage and the addition of two small boys led her husband and her to buy a slightly larger boat that more safely accommodates her family. The small boys have become tall boys who work with them to harvest halibut, sablefish and salmon from the sparkling waters of the Pacific. Her hope is that the ocean will continue to sustain them and their children’s children for long.

Their biggest threat now is climate change followed closely by industrial fisheries. Temperatures in Alaska are rising at twice the rate experienced in other parts of the country, sea ice is disappearing from the Bering Sea and shrinking in the Arctic, salmon are returning to streams so warm that they essentially cook before spawning, and sea bird populations have plummeted. As climate change reduces ocean productivity, the competition for available resources intensifies. Industrial fisheries are crushing fish stocks and fishing communities as they intensify fishing efforts to maintain production. Small-scale fishermen are calling for climate action and social justice. They are building coalitions to speak for ocean and fishing community health. Many of their tribal and fishing community leaders are women—strong women who will not give up until our government takes meaningful and effective action to address climate change and prevent industrialization of their nation’s oceans. ❖

working on the ocean, loved being part of the fishing community, and above all was awed by the beauty and wilderness of Alaska. Fishing has challenged her, humbled her and redefined her spirituality. Fishing has also in turn exhausted, exhilarated and inspired her.

After fishing for six years on fishing boats, she returned to school to earn an advanced degree in resource management with the goal of becoming a more effective advocate for the ocean and fishing communities that she loved. That passion has defined her work with the Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association and the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust. Even though the challenges are endless, she took time every summer to