

Fishing is Life

Without fishing, Alaska's coastal residents would have no way to sustain their families and their communities

I have fished off Alaska for over 30 years, first as a deckhand and then as a vessel owner/operator. The boat I now fish in with my family is 40 feet long, with diesel power, hydraulics for hauling our hook-and-line gear, and a cabin with a diesel stove to warm us after a day working on deck. We fish for halibut and sablefish with benthic longline gear, setting 'strings' that are one to three miles in length in depths ranging from 40 fathoms to 600 fathoms, depending on whether we are targeting halibut or sablefish. We also troll (another hook-and-line gear) for king and coho salmon, delivering the highest quality salmon available. We 'clean' our fish at sea,

had a unique character formed by their isolation, but they all shared a culture of fishing. Without fishing, Alaska's coastal residents would have no way to sustain their families and their communities. Fishing is life.

Our boys first went fishing with us when they were each around six months old. They were not much help in those days (!), but have become able deckhands in more recent years. They are now 13 and 15 years old. Our youngest loves everything about fish—catching them, studying them, and keeping them in an aquarium; our oldest mostly likes driving the boat and navigating. When our boys were young, we home-schooled them so we could fish during the fall and spring. Once they reached 10 and 12 years of age, my spouse and I decided they should be in regular school. We now fish four months each year, leaving the boys behind for a few trips in the spring or fall but also sometimes taking them out of school for a fishing trip. Our youngest is very opposed to missing any fishing, but the oldest is not always sorry to stay behind. He may be the shore-support person for our fishing business in the future!

Each community had a unique character formed by their isolation, but they all shared a culture of fishing.

then pack the fish in ice or a slush of ice and seawater. We are at sea during our fishing trips for three to seven days, but are sometimes gone from our home port for weeks at a time.

Before I had a family, I fished eight to ten months of the year, working my way up the coast from Sitka, Alaska, my hometown, to the Bering Sea. We fished for five days, then delivered our fish into the closest community, refuelled and re-provisioned, then headed back out fishing. We saw miles of wild coastline and explored remote islands and bays. When we delivered fish into small communities, we met people and shared stories. Each community

Wild, beautiful

The Gulf of Alaska is a wild, beautiful place, alive with whales, porpoise, dolphins, fish and seabirds or all kinds. The shore is lined with snowcapped mountains rising thousands of feet above sea level, and glaciers calving icebergs into the ocean. We are fortunate to have clean water, healthy forests and productive fisheries, a combination I never take for granted. Our home port of Sitka is on an island, and it is the only community of any size on the entire 100-mile island. The only access to

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Sitka is by boat or plane—there is no bridge or road access.

When I started fishing, the halibut and sablefish fisheries were managed with short and infrequent openings. No matter what the weather, we all went fishing because we all knew we might not get another chance for months. Fishing was exciting but dangerous, and many lives were lost. In 1995, after a long and bitter battle, an individual fishing quota system was implemented that allocates a share of the catch to people with a history in the fisheries. People who did not receive an initial allocation have to buy shares if they want to enter the fishery. The fishing season is now open for eight months each year, allowing fishermen to time their trips to take place in good weather. This has addressed safety and resource issues, but has dramatically changed the cost of entry and the social fabric of the fishing community.

I am deeply involved in fisheries management at the local, state and federal level. I am the director of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) and a US Commissioner to the International Pacific Halibut Commission. I work to engage fishermen and scientists in collaborative research, helping small-scale fishermen develop tools to address resource challenges and be more successful at catching fish. I have worked with ALFA's membership to map habitat, identify areas of high bycatch, deter sperm whales from taking fish off longline gear, develop electronic monitoring of catch, and improve fuel efficiency on small boats. I also engage small-boat fishermen in the management process, making sure their important voice is heard by decisionmakers. Most recently, we have launched an initiative to help young people gain access to local fisheries by providing a deckhand apprentice programme, business mentoring and skill-building education, and innovative financing to support the purchase of fishing permits.

I am passionate about protecting the culture of small-scale fishing



Linda with her children. The boys first went fishing when they were each around six months old

and the health of the world's oceans. I want my boys to have the same opportunity that I have had to make a living from the sea, to fish with their families and to know the satisfaction of catching and delivering a load of high-quality seafood. The work is hard at times, but with hard work comes success, and I believe fishing will help them build a strong work ethic for life. They are also developing a strong conservation ethic and an appreciation for the culture of small-boat fishing, and that is just as important to the future of our planet.

I enjoyed the ICSF workshop on the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines (SSF Guidelines) and was impressed by the insight and knowledge delivered. It seems essential to build a network of small-scale fishers and fisheries, and to aggregate the influence of this important sector. Small-scale fishers have a critical role to play in conservation, social equity and rural development. I look forward to working with ICSF to achieve shared goals and dreams. 🐟

For more

icsf.net/en/samudra/detail/EN/2568.html?detpag=mapart

Looking out for the future : Report : Coastal communities

icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_63/3804_art_Sam63_E_art11.pdf

From the heart : Alaska / Fishing People

alfafish.org/

The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association

static1.squarespace.com/static/563cfe4fe4b0b371c8422a54/t/58828fc1197aeadee07b736b/1484951598008/ALFA+Annual+Report+2016.pdf

Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association - Annual Report 2016

sites.google.com/site/ssfguidelines/
SSF Guidelines Implementation