

Linda Behnken Fisherman, Longliner, Troller, Sitka Alaska
Interviewed by Josh Wisniewski and Marissa Wilson 03/23/2022
American Folklife Center

0:00-5:00

Born in 1962, grew up in Connecticut. Coming to Alaska in March 1982, interest in wild places of Alaska. Heard you could make money for college while fishing in Alaska. Took Greyhound Bus from New York to Seattle and ferry from Seattle to Sitka. County becoming more wild as traveled north. Came up to Sitka Alaska because a friend of a friend lived in Sitka. Finding community in fishing. Independent and there for others. Picnics on boats. Processing herring, fire closes plant. Getting job with sister for a winter kind salmon trolling trip.

5:00-10:00

Volunteer boat work, knitting and baking bread for money. Getting a fill in job on a long-line boat when Deckhand doesn't show up. Getting job on family black-cod longline boat. Spring and summer fishing in Cross Sound. Halibut derbys. Using snap on gear and J-hooks. International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) study compare J hooks and circle hooks. Fishermen switch to circle hooks. Fisherman not slow to change if something has proven to work "in real world". Late 1970's, Limited Entry access to fishing, increased participation in halibut fisheries by new entrants. Fisherman diversification. Concern of moratorium, shopping for fishing history. King crab crash, more boats enter fishery. Rise of conversations on developing a quota system.

10:00-15:00

Halibut accessible small boat fishery. Skiff fishing, inside waters, working on other boats, leasing boat with boyfriend, working on bigger stuck gear boats. 1991, buying own boat. The work of longlining, fishing off shore. Trolling main fishery open to enter. Crewing on FV *Cherokee*. People coming to Alaska, finding fishing, alternative way of life

15:00-20:00.

Different approach today. Business versus lifestyle. More debt burden, fishing hard. Community of fishing friends. Owning a Monterey Clipper troller. Fishing halibut after IFQ program implemented. Friends fishing together. Trolling, lots of decision making. Hard if not catching fish. Good fishermen, struggling with decision making.

20:00-25:00

Ebb and flow of confidence with failure and success. Becoming Executive Director of Alaska Long Line Fisherman Association (ALFA) in 1991. ALFA started in 1978, Fisherman worried about stock decline and development of domestic market. Developing domestic market for Alaska based fish. Sitka Sound Seafoods paid salary. Finished graduate school, asked to run ALFA. Industrial trawler, test fishery wipes out local rock fish stocks. Shuts down rock fish long line fishery.

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25:00-34:30

Rock fish important entry level fishery, Development of fleet for halibut and black cod. Previous markets dominated by foreign fleet and Seattle halibut schooner fleet. Low sable fish prices, .29 cents per pound. Fishing in bad weather 90 miles off shore out of Yakutat in 46 ft boat. Stuck in a storm boat breaking apart. 16-18 hours to reach safety. Other boat almost sinks. Feeling nerves outside of body. Deckhand appendix bursts.

34:30-38:00

Fishing off Cape Edgecumbe, catching coho salmon, storm moves in. Clipper tough boat, but worried about taking wave over the stern. Storm blowing out of Silver Bay. Bucking into bad weather trying to get home around the Cape. Cruise ship calling to see if okay. Surviving ordeal, tied to dock cleaning fish. Never wanting to be in situation of needing to be rescued.

38:00-45:00

Getting on North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC). Graduate school thesis on transferable fishing quotas. Developing IFQ program, concern over consolidation of quota ownership Testifying before Council, getting nominated, not primary candidate. Resistance to IFQ among fishermen. Getting death threats, losing friends and boats in halibut derbys. No perfect fishery management system. Fishermen who supported conservation supported program, fishermen who didn't receive quota were against it.

45:00-50:00

Local resistance in Sitka to IFQ program. Fishermen attempt to join ALFA to vote against it. Clem Tillion. Kodiak fleet was against IFQs. Fisherman fish for history to qualify for IFQ, rewarded by management structure. Dangerous black cod fishing during derbys fishing off shore, friends lost at sea. Make or break boat payment, fishing in bad weather. Great way to raise kids fishing, longlining after IFQs for some families.

50:00-55:00

New Zealand fishing representative offers IFQs do not benefit small scale fishermen and small fishing communities. Create protections for small scale fishermen though vessel size classes. Massive increase in cost of entry into fishery unintended consequence of IFQ program. Protections were not enough to control the cost of access to the fishery. Small quota not selling for less as previously anticipated. Loss of halibut quota in smallest rural Alaska coast fishing communities. Pursuing entry level access pool program for halibut fishery.

55:00-60:00

Climate change, ecological change, changes in what fish are eating. Changes in forage fish composition. Warming waters degrade omega in salmon based on change in diet.

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Squid not as rich as herring. King salmon taste different based on diet. Climate change warning signs, dead sea birds, less dolphins off shore, general decline in abundance. Crashes in pink salmon return, logging impacts on streams, and ocean acidification.

100:00-1:05:00

NOAA red-flag presentation to NPFMC. Climate change impacting commercial fisheries. Fishermen looking to Washington D.C. for relief instead of recognizing downward Trajectories in some stocks. Heavy financial burden to switch, or diversify into different fisheries. Trollers look for feed in the water. Looking for feed in cold water pockets, glacial fed streams entering the marine environment. Decline in crab.

105:00-1:10:00

Greater consumer interest in supporting small scale fisheries and protecting the ocean. Small scale fisherman part of keeping ocean clean. Increased prominence of indigenous voices, challenging dominant world view. Relearning. Next generation, wanting future generations to have the same opportunity to fish.

1:10:59

End of interview