



Alaska Longline

FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION



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Local Fishing Group Seeks Applicants for Crew Training Program

The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA), a Sitka-based fishing group and partner organization Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust (ASFT) are seeking applicants for the Crew Training Program. Through a safe and well-guided entry level experience, the program aims to provide young people an opportunity to gain experience in, as well as an understanding of, commercial fishing and its importance to supporting coastal communities.

Formalized as part of ALFA's Young Fishermen Initiative in 2015— in late 2017 ALFA was awarded funds to get more boots on deck statewide. Since 2015, over 100 apprentices have been trained and placed on local fishing vessels in Southeast Alaska. This crew training program is a way to attract younger entrants into an industry where the average fisherman's age in Alaska is over 50.

Over several years, one of the skipper participants, ALFA Member Eric Jordan of the *F/V I Gotta*, has brought over 50 young people fishing as part of ALFA's Crew Training Program. While on the water, Eric teaches these deckhands the intricacies of commercial fishing and demonstrates sustainable fishing practices to encourage a strong conservation ethic.

The Crew Training Program aims to 1) provide young people with an interest in pursuing a career in commercial fishing an opportunity to gain experience; and, 2) give young people the opportunity to better understand commercial fishing, the lifestyle it provides, and its important role in supporting coastal communities. All while providing a safe, well-guided, entry level experience.

In 2024, ALFA and ASFT hope to place several apprentices with local and regional skippers and enhance local employment opportunities. As Executive Director of ALFA, Linda Behnken explains, "With support from numerous funders, we have been fortunate

to expand the program to include more boats, crew, and communities. Our goal is to provide young people with a safe introduction to Alaska’s fisheries and to share the curriculum we have developed through our program with fishing groups in other parts of the State and country.” Already, we have shared the Crew Training Program curriculum with several organizations throughout Alaska and coastal organizations throughout the U.S.

Since the inception of the Crew Training Program, ALFA and ASFT have been awarded several grants to support this program from groups including the Edgerton Foundation, the City and Borough of Sitka, the Alaska Community Foundation, OneUSDA Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy, National Sea Grant’s Young Fishermen’s Development Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). ALFA and ASFT are very grateful for the support of these organizations and from our community. According to funders, “the work funded by these grants will result in improved management that strengthens the welfare of fishermen and local communities, promoting healthy fish stocks and healthy fisheries.”

ALFA and ASFT are seeking applicants for the 2024 fishing season. The crew training [application](#) period is currently open and will close March 31st, 2024. Applicants must be 18 years or older to qualify. It’s free to apply; application information can be found at <https://www.alfafish.org/crewtraining>. Contact Natalie at 907-738-1286 or program.director@alfafish.org for more information.

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