



**Saving Alaska’s Ocean Fisheries: 25th Heinz Awards Honor Linda Behnken
for Her Work to Promote Sustainable Fishing Practices and Safeguard
Alaska’s Rural Fishing Communities**

*By leading collaboration between scientists and fishermen, Behnken is changing
policy and protecting the fragile ecosystems of Alaska’s coastal waters*

PITTSBURGH, October 13, 2020—The Heinz Family Foundation today named Linda Behnken, a commercial fisherman and Executive Director of the Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association (ALFA), the recipient of the prestigious 25th Heinz Award in the Environment category. Ms. Behnken is honored for her advocacy work to promote sustainable fishing practices and drive conservation policy while supporting the rural fishing communities of Alaska that rely on the ocean for their livelihood and way of life.

As part of the accolade, Ms. Behnken will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

Working at the intersection of industry, community and the environment, Ms. Behnken and the team of fishermen and staff at ALFA have achieved hard-won collaboration among all three sectors. Through ALFA, she has led efforts to support small-boat fishermen and reduce the control large industrial fishing fleets have had over Alaska’s coastal waters. Most notably, her work has effectively demonstrated that through stewardship, training, the application of sound science, and changes in conservation policy, small-boat fishermen can continue their livelihood and the ecosystem upon which her community and the fishing industry depend can be strengthened and sustained for future generations.

Ms. Behnken has commercially fished the waters along the wild coastline of Sitka, Alaska, since 1982, when she began fishing to earn money for college. After earning a master’s degree at Yale University, she returned to skipper her own boat. She still fishes commercially, now with her husband and sons.

One of Ms. Behnken’s most notable achievements with ALFA has been leading a six-year grassroots campaign to secure a ban on commercial trawl fishing in federal and state waters off Southeast Alaska. Trawling involves dragging massive nets in what is likened to clearcutting of the ocean floor, catching many nontarget species. The ban now covers more than 100,000 square miles, enabling the protection of deep-sea corals and sponges, as well as long-lived rockfish populations.

Ms. Behnken’s dedication to bringing scientists and fishermen together led to the establishment of ALFA’s Fishery Conservation Network, which engages fishermen in collaborative research with scientists to address conservation challenges and improve the viability of small boat fishing. Current

projects include rockfish bycatch monitoring to protect these long-lived species, and bathymetric mapping, which tracks the depth and topography below sea level, where ALFA has combined side-scan sonar data with fisherman-collected data to improve bycatch avoidance, assist stock assessment, minimize impacts to the sea floor habitat protection and increase the viability of small-scale fisheries. ALFA's Sperm Whale Avoidance Project reduces interactions between fishing boats and sperm whales through satellite-tagging, sonar technology and fisherman reports.

“Linda's success in achieving collaboration between scientists, industry, and the fishermen who work the ocean for their livelihood is a model for effective environmental change,” said Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Our oceans are precious resources that are under tremendous pressure from climate change and overharvesting by large, industrial fisheries. Her efforts to drive policy and practices that protect the stability of Alaska's coastal fishing communities and the ocean ecosystem on which they depend not only give us hope, they demonstrate what is possible when seemingly competing interests work together.”

Recognizing that fewer young people were entering the trade due to the high cost of entry, ALFA launched a Young Fishermen's Initiative, which aims to help the next generation of fishermen through a crew apprentice program, skill-building workshops, and low-risk loans. Ms. Behnken also co-founded the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust (ASFT), which helps new fishermen overcome financial barriers to entry into the profession. And because there are no federal programs dedicated to training the next generation of commercial fishermen, ALFA has joined forces with the Fishing Communities Coalition to advocate for the Young Fishermen's Development Act, which would provide federal funding and support for training and education in sustainable fishing practices, marine stewardship, business practices and more.

This coalition is also working to protect the interests of small fishermen, their families and their communities as climate change continues to warm the waters of Alaska and take a dramatic toll on fish populations, including an 80% drop in Pacific cod over a two-year period.

“With fish populations declining, we have to be vigilant, as industrial fisheries have the potential to take all the fish available for harvest in the ocean,” says Ms. Behnken. “We are asking managers to address bycatch of king salmon, halibut and crab, and to protect these iconic and locally important species for Alaska. This battle is common around the country, where people are struggling to prevent family businesses and communities from becoming collateral damage to big industry, whether it's farming or ranching or fishing. That is what we're up against, and climate change has exacerbated that challenge.”

She adds, “We've found a lot of concerned young fishermen who are very articulate, passionate and effective, and they are getting involved in advocacy work and going to Washington, D.C. to talk about why fisheries are important to them. It is inspiring to see their commitment. These young fishermen and the national coalitions we have built give me hope, but there is a lot at stake.”

ALFA has also established Alaskans Own, a community-supported fishery, through which consumers can support sustainable fisheries by buying a share of the fisherman's catch. This allows fishermen to plan ahead and gives local consumers access to high-quality, fresh seafood. Revenue generated by Alaskans Own is invested back into the conservation of local fisheries. And in response to the COVID-19

pandemic, which has created economic hardship for many Americans, ALFA is helping to coordinate the donation and delivery of seafood harvested by Sitka fishermen to families in need and to local charitable organizations.

Established to honor the memory of U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards this year recognize those who have made significant contributions in five distinct areas of great importance to Senator Heinz: Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Now in its 25th year, the Heinz Awards has recognized 151 individuals and awarded more than \$30 million to the honorees. For more information about the awardees visit <http://heinzawards.net/2020-recipients/>.

In addition to Ms. Behnken, the 25th Heinz Awards honored the following individuals, who will receive their awards:

- **Arts and Humanities:** *Gabriela Lena Frank, D.M.A.*, pianist and composer, who is breaking cultural, gender and disability barriers in classical music.
- **Human Condition:** *Molly Baldwin*, Founder and CEO of Roca, who developed a highly effective intervention program for young people impacted by traumatic experiences at the center of urban violence.
- **Public Policy:** *Katy B. Kozhimannil, Ph.D., M.P.A.*, professor and researcher, who is driving policy change through research that examines health care inequities and maternal mortality in rural, low-income communities and among women of color.
- **Technology, the Economy and Employment:** *Alfa M. Demmellash and Alexander D. Forrester*, founders of Rising Tide Capital, who are strengthening economic resilience through entrepreneurship, and removing the barriers to opportunity that have long impeded entrepreneurs from low-income communities.
- **Heinz Awards 25th Anniversary Special Recognition:** *David H. Autor, Ph.D.*, a leading voice in economics, whose research has transformed our understanding of the impacts of globalization and technological change on the American worker.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of the recipients, please contact Maya Brod at MBrod@burness.com or 301-467-4917.

###

About the Heinz Awards

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to him. The awards, administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit www.heinzawards.net.

Contacts: Maya Brod
301-467-4917
MBrod@burness.com

Kim O'Dell
412-497-5786
kodell@heinzoffice.org