

The Exxon Valdez Disaster: 20 Years Later

Prince William Sound, Alaska. A corner of the earth that couldn't possibly be wounded by an oil spill...or so we were told. But then, 20 years ago, the ugly truth spilled out across the water when the tanker Exxon Valdez hit a well-known reef and spewed 11 million gallons of crude oil.

Cleanup crews arrived too late to stop this spill from spreading out and killing off the wild things that failed to see it coming: otters, eagles, harbor seals, ¼ million sea birds, salmon that sustained local fishing towns, at least 20 orcas.

Eventually this oil spill oozed over 1,300 miles of rocky shoreline, where some of it remains today. To find the proof, we took a boat ride out across the water towards one of the beaches that was fouled.

As our team splashed ashore, they started smelling oily air. When they moved the rocks around they started finding toxic crude. This is the stuff that spewed from the hull of the tanker 20 years ago.

So, take a closer look at it and think about the move to plant new oilrigs and pipeline in Alaska's coastal waters and to the north in the furthest reaches of the artic. Places where we now catch much of our seafood, places where the underwater hazards may not be charted on the maps, places where the icebergs and the nasty winter weather would make stopping a big oil spill all but impossible.

Maybe you've heard otherwise. If you have, remember what they used to say about the tankers in Prince William Sound before the Exxon Valdez ran into that reef. This is the World Wildlife Fund. I am John Nielsen.

(THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT AT THE END OF THE VIDEO)

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*Still photos courtesy of the Exxon Valdez oil Spill Trustee Council

*Footage:

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*For more information about WWF's work in the Arctic, go to worldwildlife.org