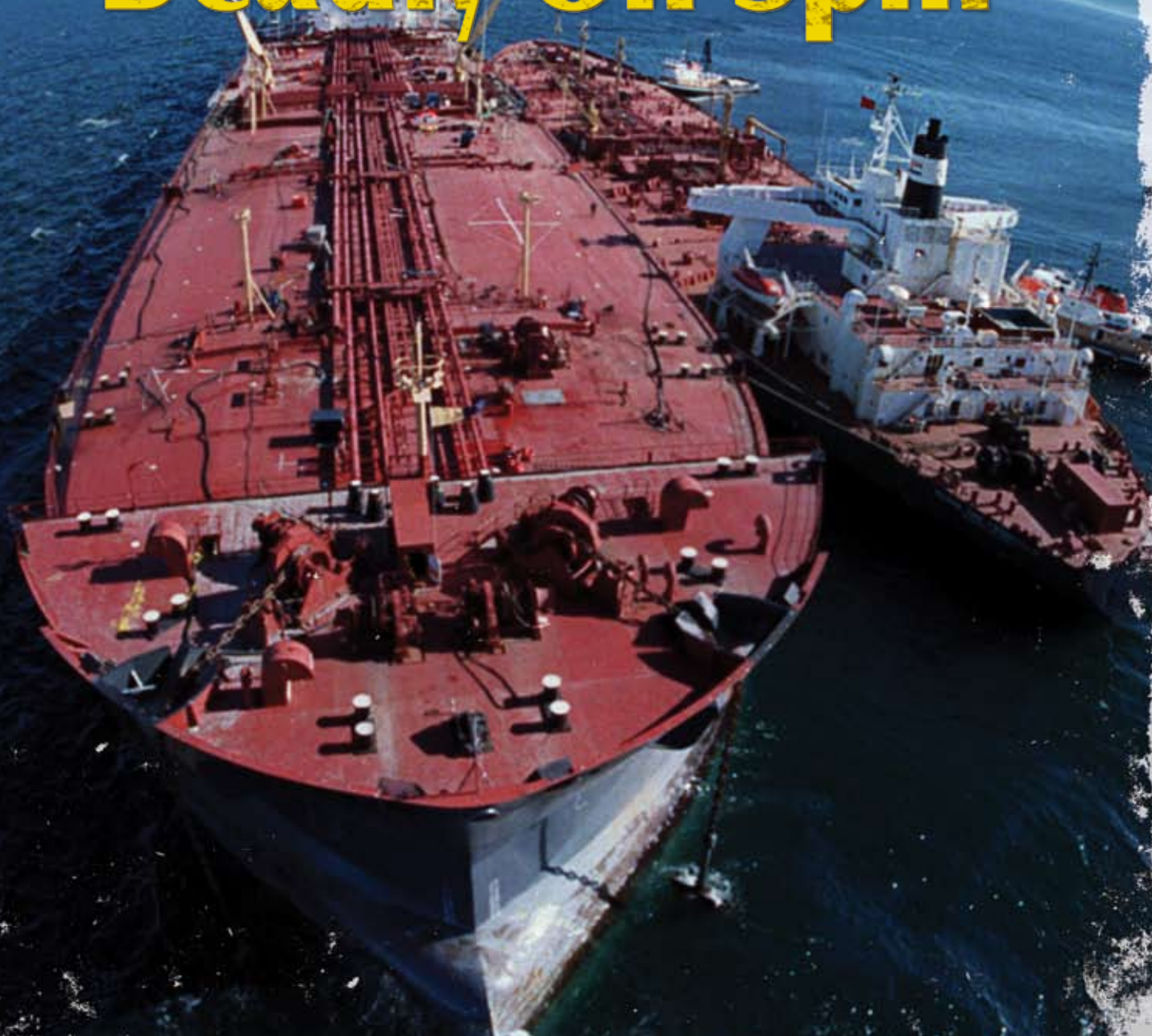


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MARCH 24, 1989

# The *Exxon Valdez's* Deadly Oil Spill



by Linda Ward Beech





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**by Linda Ward Beech**

**Consultant: Paul F. Johnston  
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# Wild kingdom awakens to sickness and death

"No withdrawal, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves."

Rachel Carson, "Silent Spring"

VALDEZ, Alaska (AP) — A winter of ice and white, still rivers and violent sea long slugs in deep caves and vast journeys to warmer seas Alaska's wild kingdom is waking up and coming home.

Waiting in Prince William Sound for the 1 million migrating ducks and geese due in month, the 10 million shorebirds passing through, the endless hummock, muske and fir with swimming north, the eagles flying south, the millions of millions of salmon eggs hatched in the gravel of swirling streams and the black and brown to oil spill in American history.

"In portions of Prince William Sound we will have a silent winter," said Joe Tarnow, an Alaskan.

rocky islands that make up the magnificent spectacle that is Prince William Sound.

watched the arrival of 20 Prince William Sound springs from the deck of a oilhead.

bottom. About that time, pink salmon fry and herring start swimming from the coast.

"On the water they can barely see 50 feet ahead. They don't know where else to go."

Prince William Sound, which contains about 800 cubic miles of water, completely flushes itself about every 30 days, said Strimling. But no one knows how much longer the oil's stain will scar the harbor's floor.

"All our efforts put together will protect a few streams and a few bays," he said. "In the end the sound will cleanse itself."

By then, it may be too late for this spring's gathering of salmon and all their distant cousins. But if spring holds no other lesson, it is that nature renews. Letting go, said.

"When your child skins a bear for the first time," she said, "you think perfection has been destroyed. But she gets over it." Alaska — the sound will recover —

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The crippled tanker Exxon Prince William Sound Wa

## Anxious

VALDEZ, Alaska (AP) — Officials awarded word Thursday from the Coast Guard on how would manage the much-litiged cleanup of the nation's worst oil spill.

Gov. Steve Cowper's Exxon's cleanup has been slow and asked Coast Guard Rear Adm. Edward Nelson to take control. The governor and Nelson agreed, but the Coast Guard said Thursday no decision had been made.

The spill of 11.1 million gallons of crude oil has killed thousands of animals in the wildlife-rich Prince William Sound, and spilled in millions of dollars losses to fishermen. It now covers more than 1,600 square miles.

In Washington, Transportation Secretary Richard Skinner testified before Congress that the cleanup plan was better equipped to handle an oil spill. He said it was too early to place blame, but that Exxon did not have enough cleanup equip-

ment. Exxon said it was not responsible for the spill, and that the ship had reached the Gulf of Alaska.

Alaska's only state that annually pays its residents just for

Alaska is the only state that annually pays its residents just for

Alaska is the only state that annually pays its residents just for

Alaska is the only state that annually pays its residents just for

marriage  
industry  
rocks

living there. Last year, each Alaskan got a "dividend" of \$127 from interest earned by the state Permanent Fund, a \$18 billion savings account derived from oil money. For a family of four, that meant \$1,304.

The flood of oil money also allowed the state to spend its income tax in 1992. There's no state sales tax.

"Most people in Alaska were that the oil industry brought benefits and detriments," Cooper said. "We've enjoyed the benefits over the years. Now we're seeing the detriments."

Bill Glavin, executive director of the Alaska Environmental Lobby, said he was surprised how widespread the sense of betrayal has become.

"We don't like to make the game that says the golden egg is comfortable. Suddenly the industry has laid a black egg and we're not too enchanted with the game," Glavin said.

"I think a lot of people are ready to declare their independence from Big Oil. We're seeing a lot of recognition that the state is entirely too dependent on the oil industry for its revenue and its people's lives."

Many observers, however, doubt Alaska's dependence on a natural resource will end as long as there's vast amounts of oil, minerals and timber to be sold in the nation's largest state.

"Resource development is an intimately linked with our history and our future," said Rep. Frank Utter, a Democrat. "We are a resource-rich state and our resources are what produce jobs, what produce income and what cost revenue to support services. Alaskans have come to expect."

Utter and other legislators predict that as a result of the spill the state will strengthen its environmental laws, provide more money to monitor compliance with those laws, and demand more proof of environmental safeguards.

Lawmakers already have jumped on the new anti-oil bandwagon. Legislation introduced Tuesday in the Senate would require oil companies to pay for pollution of state land against spill. And what appeared to be a new campaign by Cowper to narrow the state's oil production tax to just 25%.

Fired captain released after bail is reduced

# Serious Trouble

It was just after midnight on Friday, March 24, 1989. The giant oil **tanker** *Exxon Valdez* was sailing through Prince William **Sound**.

Three hours earlier, the huge ship had left the **port** of Valdez, Alaska. It was carrying 53 million gallons (201 million liters) of oil to Long Beach, California.



The *Exxon Valdez* is 987 feet (301 m) long and 166 feet (50.5 m) wide. It is about as long as three football fields.

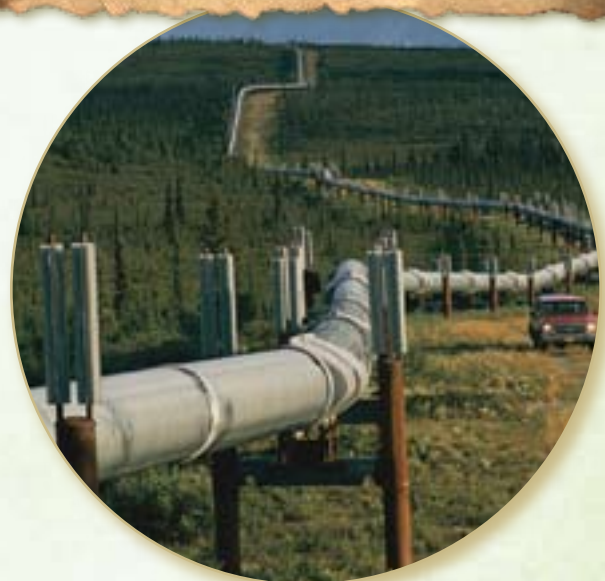


Suddenly, **Third Mate** Gregory Cousins called the captain. “I think we’re in serious trouble!” said Cousins.

His words could not have been more true. While turning, the tanker had crashed into a rocky **reef**. The accident had ripped open eight huge oil tanks on board. Sticky black oil was now gushing into the sound.



The town of Valdez is at the end of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. The pipeline carries oil 800 miles (1,287 km) across Alaska. Tankers then pick up the oil in Valdez and bring it to other U.S. cities.



**The Trans-Alaska Pipeline**

# A Race Against Time

Around 1:05 Friday morning, Dan Lawn's phone rang. Lawn worked for Alaska's Department of **Environmental Conservation**. For him, the news of the spill was a nightmare. Lawn knew it would be a race against time to clean up the oil. Millions of animals would soon be in danger.

Before the *Valdez* accident, Lawn had told the government that a major oil spill was likely. Unfortunately, his warnings were ignored.

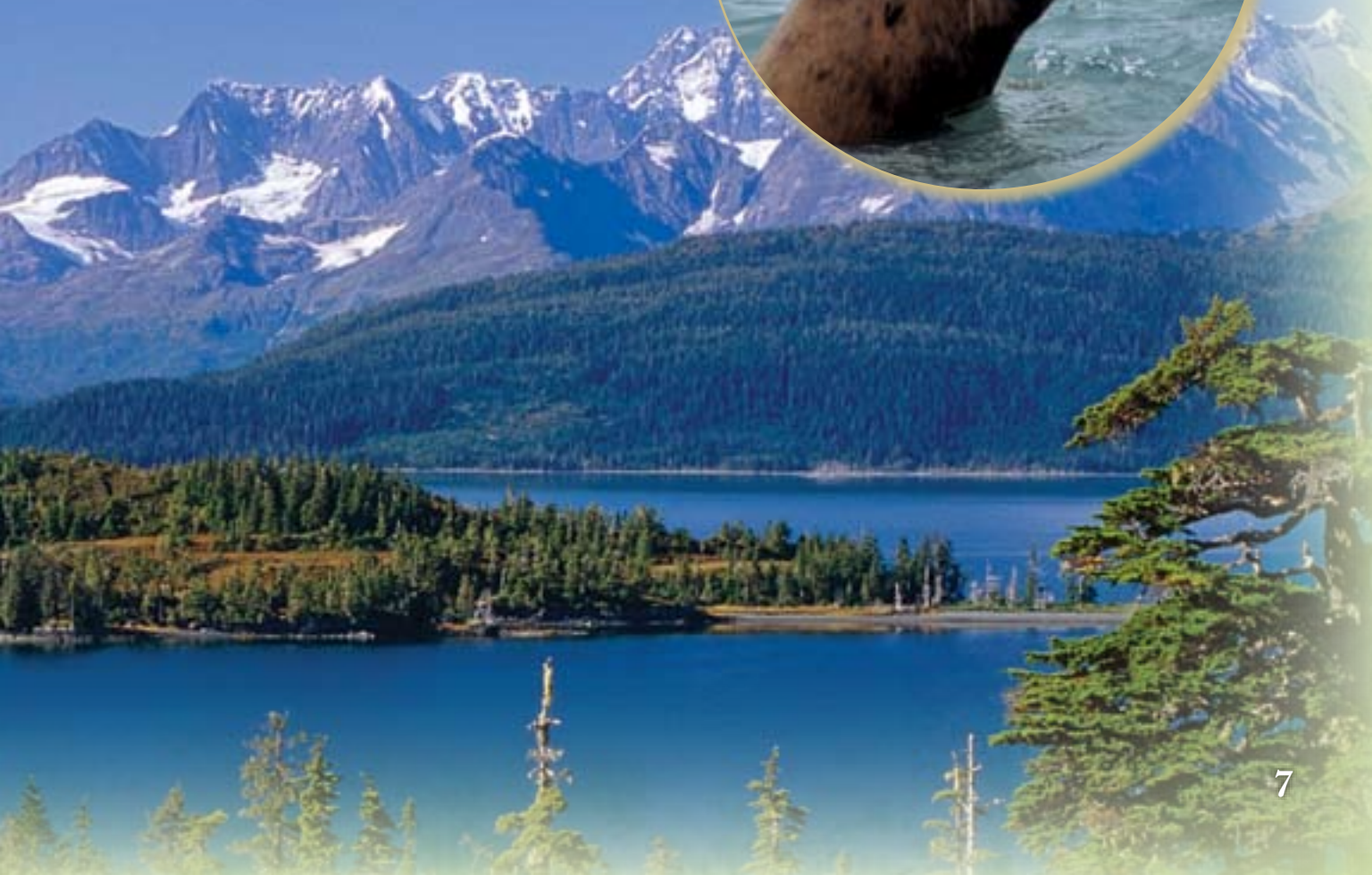




Each spring, **flocks** of birds **migrate** to Prince William Sound. Bald eagles soar over the shore. Fish, sea otters, and whales swim through the chilly water. Few of them could survive such a deadly spill.

By 3:40 A.M., Lawn's speedboat had reached the tanker. "The oil was just rolling out of the bottom," he recalled.

Animals that live in Prince William Sound depend on the water for homes and food.



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## About the Author

Linda Ward Beech has written more than 60 books for students and teachers. She has also taught reading to adults and has worked as a volunteer teacher at P.S. 199 in New York City. Her hobbies are bicycling, gardening, baking, and reading.







# The *Exxon Valdez's* Deadly Oil Spill

The *Exxon Valdez* was sailing through Prince William Sound, carrying millions of gallons of oil. Suddenly, the third mate called to the captain, "I think we're in serious trouble!" The giant tanker had crashed into a rocky reef. Sticky black oil was now gushing into the water.

Millions of fish, seabirds, otters, and other animals were in danger. People's food supplies and fishing jobs were threatened. In the days that followed, thousands of volunteers hurried to Alaska. Heroic rescuers worked long hours to save the sound and its wildlife. Yet it would take more than three years to clean up one of the worst oil spills in U.S. history.

The *Challenger* Space Shuttle Explosion

Emergency at Three Mile Island

The *Exxon Valdez's* Deadly Oil Spill

The Great Chicago Fire

The *Hindenburg* Disaster

Nightmare on the *Titanic*

The Texas City Disaster

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The 2001 World Trade Center Attack

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