

Aldo Leopold's Land Ethics in Paul Seed's *Dead Ahead: The Exxon Valdez Disaster*

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“The Land Ethics” is taken from a part from *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold. It articulates a philosophy that reveres nature and grants it moral status as a part of the community. Leopold argued that humans should conceive their relationships with nature differently. On seeing this fact, ethics focused on humans and property, he urged us to enlarge the community to “include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.” The land, then should be preserved and protected. Doing so is right. Not doing so is wrong. “Aldo Leopold says, a land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land” (Leopold). Aldo Leopold work brought forth the idea of ecology and revolutionized natural resources management. He passionately introduced a land ethic, a way of seeing our actions on the landscape through a moral lens. Using this ethic, he helped drive consideration of human actions in a more complete and thoughtful manner that effectively valued ecological function rather than simply justifying all action based on human desires. Paul Seed's *Dead Ahead: The Exxon Valdez Disaster* is based on real life incident. This movie was released on December 12, 1992 in USA, directed by Paul

Seed, produced by John Smithson and David M. Thompson, and distributed by HBO channel. Exxon Valdez oil spilt, the tanker left Alaska on March 23, 1989, at 9:12 p.m. carrying more than 53 million gallons of oil. Just three hours later, after the ship ran into a reef, thousands of gallons of oil spilt in the sea. The sum of oil spilled was sufficient to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool (see. fig. 1). It is the worst environmental disaster in history. “As a result, approximately 1,990 square kilometers of coastline was badly polluted. Nearly 2000 sea otters, 302 harbor seals, and 250,000 birds died in the days that followed the incident” (History)



Fig. 1. Thousands of gallons of oil spilt in the sea.

It was on March 4, 1989, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez struck the Bligh Reef in the Prince William Sound region of Alaska to begin one of the biggest maritime fatalities at that time. Exxon Valdez, then owned by Exxon Shipping Company, was en route to Long Beach, California from the Valdez Marine Terminal when it slammed into the reef at around 12 am local time. The tanker was loaded with roughly 54 million gallons oil of which 10.8 million gallons were released into the waters of Prince William Sound as the hull of the vessel was torn open in the accident. Exxon Valdez oil spill considered to be the second major oil spill occurred in the US territory after the Deep water Horizon oil spill. According to reports, before handing over the ship's control to the Third Mate, Hazelwood had apparently altered the vessel's course to avoid icebergs. The Third Mate, unfortunately, failed to maneuver the vessel properly and the vessel

left the shipping lane to end up colliding with the reef, chiefly due to broken radar. In fact, the radar was not working for more than a year before the oil spill accident. Further investigations also revealed that Hazelwood was under the influence of alcohol and he was asleep in his bunk during the time of the accident. It was also on the major human error.

As the oil slick spread, the ecosystem consisted of almost all of the marine and other species was under risk. Plants and marine mammals in the cold region, which were already facing the threat of extinction because of the rise in temperatures, had to deal with this human error. In addition, seabirds were also forced to succumb to this disaster as the oil slick in the water trapped them to drown eventually. It is estimated that almost 250,000 seabirds, 2,800 sea otters, up to 300 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles and at least 22 killer whales were killed in this deadliest accident (see. fig.2)



Fig.2. the effect of the oil

. In addition, the spill has also ended the lives of an unknown number of herring and salmon, the investigations conducted in the following months revealed. As an immediate result, the fisheries for crab, herring, rockfish, salmon and shrimp etc. were closed in the area, while a ban on the commercial fishing of some variety of shrimp and salmon remained through 1990. While it affected many financially, the indirect impact of the oil spill was visible on the several ends of the fishing industry. Most importantly, the impact of the oil spill was not just limited to

this. The long-term impact of the accident was and is being felt more on the eco-system and the environment. Exxon Valdez accident ended up leaving a huge impact. Even years after the accident, the region is yet to recover completely from the oil spill. The oil discharged from the Exxon Valdez still clogs the beaches in Alaska, the fishing industry that collapsed after the accident hasn't recovered fully and the trauma it created among the fishing communities still remain in the form of separated families and alcoholism etc. The cleaning up of the oil included burning, mechanical cleanup, while chemical dispersants were also used to control the impact of the oil spill. However, the penetration into the further depths of the ocean caused by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill was way too enormous for clearing-up immediately. The cleaning of the surface oil was cleared up to a larger extent, while the 'sub-surface oil' remained as a cause for the negative impact on the ecology. Though the oil has mostly disappeared from view, many Alaskan beaches remain polluted to this day, (see. fig. 3)



Fig. 3. Alaskan beaches remain polluted.

In this movie Paul Seed described the whole incident in a detailed manner, with the help of the people of Alaska. And the production company also faced many problems by the Exxon oil company. This movie create awareness to the mass audience and it helps to understand the environment in a better way. Like Leopold says both social life and ecological life affected this human error. It is indeed an unquestionable fact that the discovery of oil has dramatically

changed the human life. The oil dominates our daily life in several of direct and indirect ways in a variety of forms. However, at the same time, petroleum and its byproducts have become a major threat to the environment over the last two centuries. Most importantly, the spillages of oil from accidents involving tankers and oil rigs have polluted our seas as well as oceans and badly affected the marine ecosystem. Over the period of last two centuries, a number of accidents involving oil tankers and rigs have resulted in the spillage of millions of gallons of oil into our oceans. Among the oil spills occurred in the last five decades, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill remains a noticeable one. In an accident took place almost 30 years ago, over 11 million gallons of crude oil was released into the waters of the Gulf of Alaska, hurting the ecosystem badly as it killed hundreds of thousands of species. Crude oil buried just inches below the surface. All over the world oil spill is very common, India also facing the same problems often, In 2017 Tamil nadu Ennor oil spill affect the ecosystem. People never worry about nature. Polluting rivers with factories' waste and dumping the rivers with daily waste is a very common in India. These kinds of movies creating awareness to the people through visual media, more than a text moving images creating great impact to peoples' mind. Aldo Leopold's Land Ethics helps people to rethink the relationship between nature and humans.

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