

Alaska oil spill was a message about

Cindy Westra returned to Central Florida this week after nearly two weeks in Alaska, where she helped otters injured when the tanker Exxon Valdez spilled 240,000 barrels of oil into Prince William Sound March 24. Westra, who nurses injured animals at the Back to Nature center near Bithlo, flew to Alaska as a volunteer and was hired by Exxon to treat otters. This is the last installment of the diary she kept at the rescue center in Valdez.

April 17, 1 a.m.: We lost otter No. 554 on the day shift. Glad I wasn't there. Another pregnant female, No. 326, has given us all hope. We've seen her fetus move and she seems stabilized, but stable doesn't mean much here. At any time they can start convulsing.

I went to the harbor to see the three they put in holding tanks there. Did my heart good. They were swimming, diving, doing somersaults and lying on their backs grooming. Happy little otters. I wish they all could be like that.

No one knows yet what to do with the ones that recover. They have no home to return to and may try migrating back here if released elsewhere.

I feel fear for their future just as I do when I release my rehabilitated wildlife in Florida. There's no

safe place left away from man to live their lives as God intended.

Talked on the phone to Ann [Young, bird rehabilitator in Altamonte Springs] today. Not only is she getting in toxic adults [back in Central Florida] but also a lot of babies. Makes me angry. . . . Why doesn't anyone understand that everything they spray or use outside is killing our wildlife?

Same old story. Wipe out panther and bear, you're left with lots of bobcats and foxes. Wipe out bobcats and foxes, you're left with a lot of raccoons. I could go on and on. It just never seems to end. Man intends to wipe out one thing and then that creates a new method to wipe out others. It's just a matter of time before man succeeds in wiping everything out. Then what?



April 18, 1:20 a.m. No. 326 is doing well and the baby she carries is very active. A decision is made to send her to someplace where she will be in water. Otters give birth in water and they want to give her every chance. If it is successful, it will be the first pup born into a world that won't be the same. I hope this is not all in vain. It has been four days since any otters have come in. Distressing to deal with.

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