

Spills, Sounds, Bays

Could a catastrophic spill happen as easily elsewhere along the nation's coasts? Arguably, it was less likely to happen at Valdez than most places, many oil-spill observers say. "Because of the immense pressure to take whatever safeguards necessary to get on with the pipeline, more was done to anticipate the problem in Prince William Sound than is likely to ever be done anywhere else," said Saunders Hillyer, a lawyer who fought the pipeline and now works for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a group based in Maryland that watchdogs oil pollution and a wide range of other water-quality issues.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/the-exxon-valdez-oil-spill-paradise-lost-233235/15/>

Saunders Hillyer has written extensively about Maryland's Critical Area program and specifically addressed the divergent expectations for the Critical Area Act. His 1988 article titled "The Maryland Critical Area Program: Time to De-Mythologize and Move Forward," summarized the high expectations held by supporters and opponents of the Act and made several observations and predictions about the future of the Critical Area program. He stated that opponents of the Critical Area program believed "that the criteria would prohibit all development in a thousand foot buffer around the Bay, a misconception that persists to this day." Mr. Hillyer observed that, despite the expectations, the Critical Area program provided "for far more development in the Critical Area than either its supporters or opponents were likely to have foreseen." In his conclusion, Mr. Hillyer opined that

[t]he Critical Area Program has emerged as a solid, moderate beginning of the long-term campaign to restore the Bay. It displays in embryonic form the fundamental elements of a successful Bay restoration program by providing for economic development, but only development that respects the watershed's ecological limitations, particularly the extraordinary sensitivity of the edge where land and water meet. If anything, public support for protecting the watershed is a full step ahead of this moderate beginning, perhaps far ahead. As the true character of the Critical Area Program becomes more clearly perceived, 59 dissipates, the time may soon come to take the next step. At the risk of over-speculation, it appears justified to anticipate that the people of Maryland will demand to tighten up some of the omissions and loopholes in the existing criteria ... and to extend to other parts of the Chesapeake Bay watershed the effort to reconcile land development with the imperative to restore the Bay.