THE CLEAN WATER ACT: *40 Years of Progress* IN PERIL

In 1972, a long-fought battle spearheaded by the Izaak Walton League and other conservation groups resulted in a Clean Water Act to protect America's waterways from pollution. Forty years later, the conservation community finds itself facing another battle — this time to protect the Clean Water Act itself.

BY SUZANNE TELLER

It is not difficult to hear the voice of a healthy waterway — if you are in the habit of listening. A sun-drenched early morning elicits a symphony of sounds from a pristine trout stream. A sudden splash reveals a startled muskrat. The quiet slap of an oar gives away a fisherman as he settles on a spot to drop his line and meditate. Heard on a regular basis, these voices become an essential part of the human experience. And when they disappear, the ensuing silence can be deafening.

Forty years ago, our waterways were deafeningly silent. So the nation's leaders suspended partisan politics — and overrode a presidential veto — to legislate one of the most innovative and forward-thinking federal policies. In 1972, Congress enacted amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act that are collectively known as the Clean Water Act.

The primary goal of the Clean Water Act is to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of our nation's waters." Considered one of the most important environmental laws in the United States, the Clean Water Act embodies the philosophy that major environmental problems can best be solved with