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There's Still Hope for the Future

Go down to the waterfront in St. Louis or Kansas City, look at the turgid waters of the Mississippi or the Missouri, mutter "P.L. 92-500." and go home to wait...

That's the title of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 and what has happened and, more important, what will happen between now and 1983 is in a study by the President's Commission on Water Quality. It has some intriguing statistics.

If the Act goes as scheduled, there would be almost 237 million additional days of ocean fishing by 1985. Freshwater fishing benefits would top $578 million more a year.

If all public beaches now closed to swimming because of water pollution were open, an estimated additional 1,128 miles of shoreline and 7,165 acres of public beach would be available.

There are many other statistics--land values would rise, boating benefits would rise. As the report says, there are indications that persistent chemical concentrations in drinking water cause cancer, though information is scanty.

But the key is that pollution is costing America a lot on money, no matter how convenient it is to industry and other pollution sources to use waterways as dumps or how much it would cost to clean up those waterways.

Clean water is not a luxury, it is an investment. P.L. 92-500 is "to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's waters."

But implementation of the act has not been smooth. There are frequent gripes from pollutors and much bureaucratic bickering.

"Man-hours spent in bickering between Federal and state officials may be unproductive man-hours in terms of water quality," says the Water *Quality Commission. "The resources of* all interest or affected groups are needed--cooperating at least in an atmosphere of 'constructive tension' – to make the Act work for its intended benefits to all the people."

That waterways can be cleaned up is proved. Fishermen now catch trout in Detroit's Detroit River where only a few years ago, the water was so contaminated that nothing could live in it. Lake Erie has made a remarkable comeback.

But problems remain. Fish in a number of areas, including Illinois' Garlyle Lake, are so contaminated with pesticides such as dieldrin or chemicals such as PCBs that they either are unfit to eat or people are urged to ration their intake.

What a horrible commentary on what we've done to our aquatic wildlife--we've turned fish into lethal chemical time bombs.

Both the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers in Missouri's big cities offer great recreational potential, but not in their present condition.

By 1985, P.L. 92-500 has a goal of eliminating "the discharge of pollutants into navigable waters."

Perhaps in 1986, you can walk down to the waterfront in St. Louis or Kansas City and say, "believe I'll just take a little dip and then maybe go fishing."



The nation's water pollution law has a goal of zero discharge of pollutants into navigable waterways by 1985. The goal, if realized, would add millions of dollars and man-days of recreation to what presently is available, as well as opening areas now too contaminated for human use, according to figures in a Presidential commission study report. (Department of Conservation photo)

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