

Bottom Moose battle redefined American Whitewater

The Bottom Moose is more than just one of the nation's premier whitewater runs, it's a living monument to American Whitewater's first major conservation battle—fighting to save the Bottom Moose in upstate New York.

At that time in 1985, AW was an organization in slow decline. Once a vibrant association of paddling clubs dedicated to the promotion of whitewater sport and boating safety, by 1985 AW was reduced to a membership of less than 1,000 with a magazine published only sporadically and a treasury measured in cents rather than dollars.

In short—AW couldn't have been in worse shape to take on a tough opponent like the Long Lake Energy Corporation—the private utility that planned to develop a small hydroelectric plant by dewatering the final two miles of the Bottom Moose.

Saving the Moose

But while AW had reached its nadir, it still counted Pete Skinner as an

asset. Skinner, an AW director and class 5 boater from Albany, accepted saving the Bottom Moose as a personal crusade.

Working with a small network of volunteers and a nonexistent budget, Skinner championed whitewater interests during the project's licensing procedure with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In the end, the project was built—but not before Long Lake had agreed to provide boaters with water releases in the project area for spring and fall paddling seasons.

A new mission

The battle for Bottom Moose was only a limited victory—but it still stood as AW's first success as an organization in protecting a recreational resource. The struggle redefined AW's mission and transformed its image to that of an aggressive river advocate effectively fighting for wilderness waterways.

AW's new direction encouraged other talented river conservationists like Mac Thornton, Pope Barrow,

Tom Christopher and others to take active roles in the organization's leadership. And just in time—because as the issues on the Moose were being resolved, AW joined the battle to save whitewater on the nearby Black River where another hydro project was planned.

The project on the Black was also built—but

this time AW negotiated a precedent-setting agreement that provided for whitewater recreation throughout the entire paddling season.

The two successes energized AW. During the next two decades, AW expanded dramatically with a membership to over 9,000; a full-time professional staff was hired; a panel of regional coordinators were recruited and, of course, conservation and access battles were contested and won.

Using the lessons first learned on the Bottom Moose, AW has protected or reopened whitewater sections on the Deerfield, Bea-

ver, Raquette, Salmon, Sacandaga, Nisqually, Feather, Tallullah, Cheoah and others across the country.

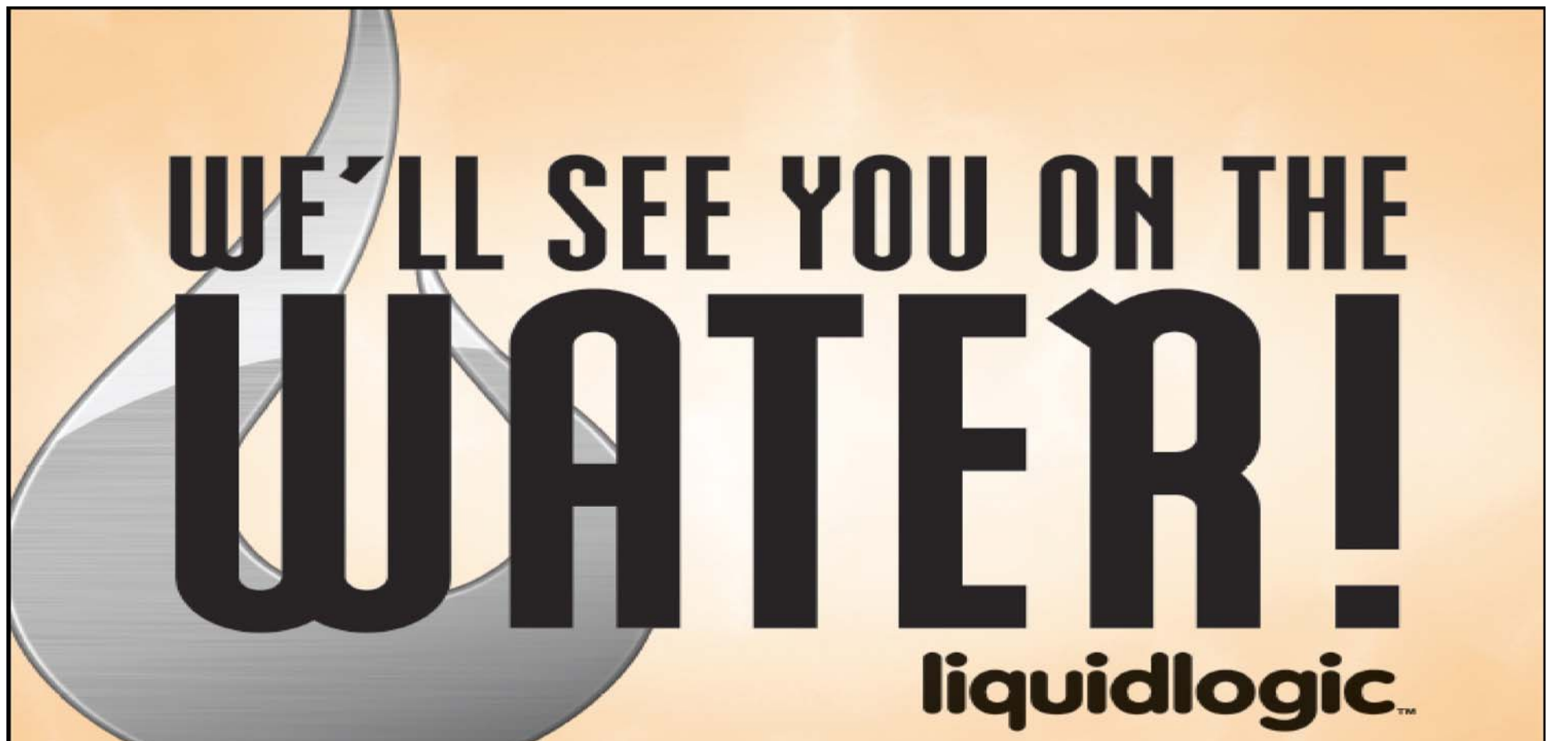
The list of whitewater resources helped by AW spans the country as AW has developed into the nation's foremost whitewater conservationist. No other organization has accomplished as much with limited resources in saving whitewater.

But the revitalization of AW all started when the need to protect the Bottom Moose launched the organization in a new direction back in 1985.

Jim Swedberg photo



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