

One of my regular customers from Virginia was here recently fishing with me, and he brought up an interesting concept while we were talking about the ongoing problem with hypersalinity and brown tide in Baffin Bay. The longstanding drought we are still experiencing in South Texas has elevated salinity levels to extreme levels, particularly in remote parts of Baffin Bay and its satellites. Water that is super salty becomes toxic to some marine organisms, eventually causing water quality issues.

Rain falling from the sky would, of course, help bring salinity levels back toward their normal levels. Absent abundant rainfall, not much can be done to correct the hypersalinity, except, it seems, dredging a big channel through Padre Island so water from the Gulf of Mexico can move in and out of Baffin more easily. A dredging project of a size significant enough to correct salinities in the rock-studded regions of Baffin would be expensive indeed, both up front and long-term. All channels require maintenance; mother nature works hard to close them back up once they are opened by the tools of man.

Sheldon Arey, the aforementioned customer, pointed out there may be another option, one I had never considered. He mentioned a project currently ongoing in his home state which has had a positive impact on a remote estuary, one that's part of the Chesapeake Bay system. Salinity levels in the little satellite bay, called Back Bay, are made more conducive to the marine organisms which live there through the pumping of ocean water into the estuary. A pipeline carries water straight from the Atlantic and deposits it into Back Bay. According to Sheldon, this has made a profoundly positive impact on the health of the bay.

I'm thinking the same thing could be done to bring salinity levels in Baffin more in line with those along the beachfront. Why couldn't several pipelines be laid across Padre Island, through the Meadows and into Baffin? If ocean water were pumped into areas like Cathead, Penascal Point, E Kleberg and Los Corralos, wouldn't the water quality in those places (and possible all of Baffin) improve over time?

On the surface, it seems to me that moving water in one direction (from the Gulf to Baffin) would be beneficial to the estuary. It might be more beneficial than a channel, even a large one like the ship channel in Port Aransas. I'd venture to say the cost of setting up and maintaining a handful of pipes and pumps would be far less costly than dredging and maintaining a major channel.

Currently, I'm waiting on Sheldon to send me more info about the project in Virginia, which I might share in a subsequent blog. I'd also welcome anyone to email me or call with ideas as to how we might promote the concept of pumping water into Baffin, and/or generate interest in some entity doing a study on the feasibility and positive potential of such a project.