

THE BEACON

Babylon Village, West Babylon, North Babylon, Deer Park, Lindenhurst, West Islip and Long Island, New York

GUEST COMMENTARY: A big idea for the Great South Bay

October 22, 2020

By Wayne Horsley

The writer will be making the following presentation Nov. 9 before the Environmental Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature at 10 a.m., with Charles Flagg, PhD, Stony Brook.

A sad fact is the Great South Bay is still very ill. New York State and Suffolk County are valiantly fighting the good fight to reduce nitrogen in our enriched heated bay. Removing the nitrogen, upgrading septic systems, and controlling storm runoff will minimize the impact of the growing presence of algae blooms which is suffocating fish and shellfish while continuing to choke the life out of the bay. The costs are enormous, and to be effective it will take time. That fight must be sustained, but is it enough? I submit to you it is also a matter of inadequate water flow.

The issue came to a head for me when during a fundraising boat ride in early May of 2016 to create a statue in Babylon Village called "The Bayman," the ride was marred by an early May brown tide. The Bayman, which now stands proudly in Argyle Park in the Village depicts a 1970s bayman at the height of the clamming industry when the bay produced two-thirds of the world's hard-shell clams. Behind the heroic sized bronzed clammer, the story is told of once abundant harvests and a bay teeming with life, and then its ultimate collapse. The water looked as if you poured a boiling cup of coffee and added cream.

In 1927-28 when creating the Ocean Parkway, Robert Moses filled in an existing inlet and altered the Bay's natural flow of water. Ever since, the area approximately where the old Coast Guard Station existed, the Littoral drift of sand thins out the Gilgo Beach shoreline. Every couple of years, the Army Corps must replenish the lost sand to insure the integrity of the beachfront and ultimately the Parkway. In fact, the Corps is replenishing this exact location this year. One of my former administrative

By continuing to browse or by clicking "Accept," you agree to our site's privacy policy.

[Accept](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

In consideration of working with Mother Nature, the proposed engineered inlet should be non-navigable and designed solely for the transport of water flow. Experts in the field have successfully weighed in on the issue that increased flow through openings in the barrier beach will not raise the water level on the main land. This issue of concern was argued after Hurricane Sandy opened a natural inlet at 'Old inlet' in Bellport Bay. In fact, the re-formation of 'Old Inlet' points out that nature wants to do what nature wants to do! Since 'Old Inlet' opened, environmentalists as well as bay lovers have marveled at the condition of the Bellport and Moriches Bay. This cleansing does little to help the western sections of the Bay and points to the need for a second new source of water flow. The need to include a storm gate and be able to shut off the inlet is simply to provide protection from eventual hurricanes and northeasters. A storm surge could overwhelm the inlet and undermine the integrity of the structure and Parkway, as well as negatively change the dynamics of water being forced onto the mainland.

Another benefit to creating the inlet at Gilgo is that while we are excavating we can finally dig out the remains of the old Coast Guard Station. The station was demolished in the late '70s and the foundation remains as a permanent fixture to the beachscape. Unfortunately, the skeleton of the station reappears each time the sand depletes. Once uncovered the station's remains act as a groin and scallops out the adjoining Town of Babylon's Gilgo Beach. In addition, while designing the Gilgo inlet we can make the four-wheel drive access far more user friendly.

As with any "big idea" there are those that will remain skeptical. One such fear is that with the littoral drift of sand an engineered inlet will be in short order clogged with sand. We would have to regularly dredge out the opening and it soon would become an operational nightmare. Another is that the Bay flushes itself naturally through above and below freshwater streams. The Bay will not flush properly until we increase the natural flow of fresh water.

The intent of this opinion piece is to foster a discussion on how to Save Our Bay. The economic, environmental and recreational benefits to saving our Bay are immense. Bays and waterways like the Chesapeake Bay have proven to be resilient, why not the Great South Bay? To answer this clarion call, I would like to challenge Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences to study this "big idea," Pass the idea around!

By continuing to browse or by clicking "Accept," you agree to our site's privacy policy.

[Accept](#) [Privacy policy](#)