

Conservation Profile: The Langley Family Protecting a Legacy of Place

The Langley family secured a tradition, and a future, with a conservation easement.



If the fields and woods on Great Bay's Durham Point could talk, you'd hear plenty of stories about the Langley family, whose roots go back here more than five generations; throughout that time they have maintained a strong connection to the land that continues to this day.

With that in mind, the Langley family made a decision in 2006 to protect their lands. The family sold a conservation easement to 86.9 acres to The Nature Conservancy.

The purchase, made on behalf of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, allows the Langley's to continue owning and managing their lands, but prevents the land from being developed, even if the family sells the land.

The easement includes a well-known local landmark: a small herd of buffalo, and a 30-acre woodlot. The woodlot easement was transferred to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, one of the principal partners in the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. Both easements protect important forest, wetland, and grassland habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds and other wildlife in the Great Bay region. Funding for the project came largely from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the town of Durham was also a partner.



Marley Langley at Little Bay Buffalo Company © Eric Aldrich

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David Langley

Winding down the narrow, meandering dirt road that approaches the family land, it seems that the pace of life has slowed. The backdrop of the bay catches and throws the sunlight, the green-gold fields and dense woodlots teem. It’s easy to see how one family has such an enduring connection to the place.

The Langley’s have lived in Durham since 1714 and acquired this particular property in 1890. The family introduced buffalo here in 1986. “My grandfather was born in that house,” David Langley said, pointing to a large brick house that presides over the open fields.

Langley has always felt that he belongs to the land, despite living in a mobile society where so few people have a relationship with place. He envisions his grandchildren growing up the way he did, skipping rocks on the bay.

Langley said the easement on his family's land provides enough latitude for the family to continue using and caring for the land as they wish. “The Nature Conservancy is like a silent partner, here to protect the land beyond a landowner’s lifetime,” he said.

“The dominant view of land acquisition has shifted dramatically, compared to a time when people held on to their land through good and bad times” Langley said. “Land has become an investment, and very few people leave a legacy. This easement gives us a feeling of continuity... No matter what occurs, it will always be here; the legacy will continue.”