

80 historic acres overlooking Little Bay conserved

Langley family land to remain farm, wildlife habitat

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Saturday, October 28, 2006

DURHAM — When the Langley family first purchased the land that currently houses the Little Bay Buffalo Company, the University of New Hampshire was still a few years away from being established.

While the university has grown to dominate the town, the 80 or so acres of land occupied by the Langley family remains largely unchanged. That preservation will continue well into the future due to a partnership between The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Langley family. TNC recently announced it purchased a \$1.8 million conservation easement on the 85.9 acres of land that overlooks Little Bay, securing its status as a working farm as well as a habitat for birds and other wildlife.



Marley Langley stands in the lower pasture of his family's Little Bay Buffalo Company on Durham Point Road in Durham. (Courtesy photo)

The family will continue to own and manage the land. The Nature Conservancy and the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests will own the conservation easements on the farmland and the woodlot, respectively. The Langleys have owned the land since the 1880s.

The Langley property is steeped in Seacoast history. A garrison was built in that section of the bay during the late 1600s, and Native Americans attacked the area during the 1694 Oyster River Massacre. Two hundred years later, a brick kiln located on the property baked bricks that were shipped by gundalow along the Piscataqua to Portsmouth, Durham and Newmarket.

Efforts to protect the land have been 10 years in the making, according to Eric Aldrich, communications director for TNC. The Langley family wanted to ensure that the land be preserved and maintained for future generations, and asked TNC for help. It cost \$1.8 million for the conservation easements, Aldrich said. The project was funded by a collaborative effort among TNC, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the town of Durham and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. The town of Durham contributed \$200,000 to the project.

David Langley, owner of the Little Bay Buffalo Company, said his family has lived in Durham since 1714. The family acquired the land near Little Bay in the late 1800s, and he said the agricultural resources of the land have almost always been utilized. Langley opened the bison farm in 1985. The farm, located off Durham Point Road, hosts educational programs on the bison

and the history and culture of Native Americans in the region, and also sells livestock.

"I had an interest in them since I was a little kid. I thought it might be fun to have them there. The business side of it was an offshoot of costs associated with raising them," he said.

Preserving the land is important to the family and the region as a whole, Langley said.

"It's sort of a sense of respect not only to our ancestors, but also to the land they felt a part of," he said. "From a regional perspective, it's probably one of the last, best pieces of open space on the bay."

The family wanted to ensure that the farm and the land surrounding it would remain whole and not split up into smaller parcels. With new housing developments cropping up around the bay, protecting open space is important, he said.

"It's important for us to maintain our open space and teach our children how to properly manage and take care of what resources we have," he said.

That family legacy played a major role in the conservation efforts, according to Aldrich.

"They have such a strong connection with the land there and it runs generations deep. That was really key on their mind when they decided to do this," Aldrich said.

The land is an important piece of the Great Bay watershed. It has a prominent location on Durham Point and is an excellent area for migrating waterfowl to nest, according to Aldrich. The large open fields and the thickly forested woodlot also serve as vital habitats for song birds, white-tailed deer and other wildlife, Aldrich said.

"In southern New Hampshire, it's increasingly uncommon to find large parcels of land that are undeveloped," he said. "It's also uncommon to find lands that are large in size that harbor (the) mix of habitat conditions we've been looking to protect."

The project is one of several recent land acquisitions by the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. Other acquisitions include a 133-acre parcel off Bennett Road in Durham; a 22-acre parcel off Jenkins Road in Madbury and an 8.6-acre parcel off Bay Road in Madbury.

Aldrich called the bison farm a local landmark. While the Langley property is one of the more high-profile preservation efforts that TNC has engaged in, Aldrich stressed the importance of the other acquisitions. The preservation efforts will have positive affects for future generation, he said.

"We're looking at the long term, hundreds of years out," he said. "They'll be an ecological value."