

Georgians face intrusion

Editor's note: Although this tiny town is thousands of miles away from Alaska and the people probably have never met an Inuit, Athabascan or Tlingit, they have many things in common with the people of Alaska's rural villages. We thought this story would be of interest to the peoples of Alaska's villages.

The Associated Press

Hog Hammock, Ga. — Residents of this tiny community on Sapelo Island, an hour's ferry ride from the mainland, are trying to save their unspoiled way of life without factories or tourists.

"The young people are all leaving, the old people are dying and nobody's having babies," said Mildred Grovner, 53, who has seen the community dwindle from several hundred residents to fewer than 90.

Residents want to spur the economy, but there are roadblocks to reckon with: no factories and no hotels are allowed.

"Unless we can come up with some sort of mechanism to attract the young people, Hog Hammock will die," said Benjamin Lewis, chairman of the Hog Hammock Community Foundation Inc.

"Hog Hammock is the only civilized, organized community on the Georgia coast inhabited totally by blacks that has not been infiltrated by commercialization," Lewis said.

Young people leave because the only jobs on the island are

with the Department of Natural Resources or the University of Georgia's Marine Institute, and there aren't enough to go around.

Lewis works as director of development at Savannah State College, but returns to the island as often as possible.

The Legislature recognized the uniqueness of Hog Hammock this year by setting up the Sapelo Island Heritage Authority to help preserve the area.

The legislation calls Hog Hammock the last community of its kind in Georgia and says it is in danger of being "irreparably altered" by progress.

Lewis said turning toward Hog Hammock's past may be a key to solving the problems of the present.

"There is enough expertise in Hog Hammock among the inhabitants to market their skills," Lewis said. "Uncommon, almost forgotten skills, like basket-weaving, net- and wreath-making are already being turned into cash, although not by Sapelo residents.

"Some of our people make wreaths and sell them for, say \$2.50. When the wreaths finally get to market in gift shops they're going for \$16 or \$20 with just a little bit of spray paint and a decoration (added). We want to do the finished product here ourselves."

Brunswick lawyer Orian Douglas, who represents the Hog Hammock Foundation, said residents may renovate an abandoned building for use by

some future business operation.

"When restored, this building could provide space for easy-to-operate, income-generating ventures," Douglas said. "By next spring we hope to have a professional staff person ready to present a detailed proposal for bringing industry to the island."

But the Sapelo Island Heritage Authority legislation takes some of the keys to the island's future out of the residents' hands. No resident may be a part of the foundation board, which is chaired by Joe Tanner, commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources.

The DNR owns or manages 1,100 acres of the 1,600-acre island.