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Saving Jekyll

Back a little better than two decades, when former Gov. M. E. Thompson purchased Jekyll Island for the state, the very fact of the purchase became a political issue. Thompson was criticized; the island called a "white elephant."

It has been apparent for a good while now, however, that buying Jekyll was one of the smartest things any Georgia governor ever did.

It is, quite bluntly, a magnificent piece of real estate, a beautiful island much of which has been preserved in the natural state which so attracted some of the nation's wealthiest men that they built vacation cottages on Jekyll more than 50 years ago.

It would be a shameful thing if we permitted the beauty of this magnificent island to be destroyed by cheap exploitation.

There is a real danger of such exploitation. The developed portions of the island now include roughly one third of the ground above the high water mark. There are plenty of fast buck artists perfectly willing to press the Jekyll Island Authority for permission to develop this or that, always alleging that their particular project could only improve the island.

Fortunately, we think members of the authority and members of the Georgia General Assembly are fully aware of the danger.

Ben Wiggins, chairman of the authority, has declared a moratorium on any further development of the island for a time, at least until after the 1973 session of the General Assembly, so the patten of future development of Jekyll can be spelled out in law.

The move came at the request of Atlanta Rep. Mike Egan, who sponsored legislation last year to limit the development of the island to a maximum of 35 per cent of the ground above the high water mark. Unhappily, however, says Egan, there is confusion over how the law should be interpreted. One legal opinion holds that the 35 per cent figure applies only to leasing or selling land on Jekyll, not to developments.

Egan, pleased at the news that Wiggins has put a stop to immediate development on Jekyll until the 1973 legislation session, had this comment: "I am sure that the members of the commission want to keep the island as delightful as possible—but members of the commission come and go. I want the limitations set out by law, as nature indicated, so that no future commission could change it."

We hope the appropriate legislation will be drawn to make the intent of the Georgia General Assembly clear about preserving Jekyll. We hope our legislators pass such legislation early in the 1973 session.