All crab traps required to have ID tags by July 1

By The Associated Press

HOUMA — Louisiana's thousands of commercial and recreational crabbers must put stainless steel ID tags on their traps by July 1.

The crab industry asked for the law requiring trap markers, said Vince Guillory, a biologist with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "The reason was to help with enforcement. There were a lot of people running other fishermen's traps and stealing the crabs or stealing the traps," he said.

Since enforcement agents had no way to tell who owned which crab trap, thefts were epidemic, Guillory said. Many fishermen threatened to shoot poachers.

Eventually, some crabbers organized and pushed for laws to prevent crabbers from working at night, when most poaching took place, and to set up a standardized marking system.

The Louisiana Crab Task Force drew up plans for the new markers, which were approved in February. Fishermen must buy or make 1.5-inch self-locking tags, and stencil or stamp the tags with their commercial or recreational crab fishing license number.

The tags must be attached to the center of the trap's ceiling. A fact sheet describing how to make and attach the tags and listing possible sources of stainless steel is available at offices of the Wildlife and Fisheries Department and Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, as well as crab buyers.

Although only 413 of the 2,800-plus people with commercial crabbing licenses are from Terrebonne Parish, nearly one-third of all the state's crabs are in Terrebonne Parish, according to Wildlife and Fisheries.

In 1990, Terrebonne Parish docks bought 11.3 million of the 38 million pounds landed in Louisiana.