Guste Shocked To Learn Of Reef Dredging Lease

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Attorney General William Guste says he was shocked to learn of a 1980 lease in which the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries granted an Alabama company the right to dredge the Point au Fer reefs.

Guste said that since some of the reefs in the chain form an important part of the state’s boundary, no dredging leases should have been let in that area without first consulting his office.

An official with the Alabama firm, Radcliff Materials Inc., said Thursday he doesn’t believe the firm dredged in the Point au Fer chain during the period of that lease, which ended last December.

And if the company had dredged in the area it would not have disturbed important boundary points, said Don Palmore of Radcliff.

J. Burton Angelle, who signed the lease as then secretary of wildlife and fisheries, said he doesn’t recall the document. Another wildlife and fisheries officials who does recollect that lease said the department felt the lease would not endanger the state’s boundary line.

Dredging in that area is currently restricted by permits issued earlier this year by the Department of Natural Resources, according to Winston Day of DNR.

Day said the 1980 lease appears to have covered certain areas that had been declared off limits by the attorney general.

A 1975 U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowed the state state to claim valuable oil fields by expanding its boundary using the reefs as land masses.

However, those reefs have almost disappeared either due to natural subsidence and erosion or the activities of man. State officials fear that if further loss is not stopped, the state may have difficulty defending a boundary attack if the federal government attempts to claim royalties on the valuable oil and gas fields in the area.