By BOB ANDERSON
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Four shell dredging companies have filed appeals of the restrictions placed on their activities in permits issued by the Department of Natural Resources.

Last week dredging opponents filed appeals of the permits.

The appeals will go to the Coastal Commission, which will decide whether DNR acted in accordance with the state's coastal regulations and whether the appeals were filed in a timely manner.

One of the permit provisions the dredging companies complain about is that the companies can be required to use some of the shells they dredge to create new reefs.

"Planting such reefs under certain conditions and in some offshore areas place a tremendous financial burden as well as severe logistical problems on the shell producers," the appeal says.

The dredging companies maintain in their appeal that some of the regulations, including those that place certain areas off limits to dredging, are "unworkable and unreasonable."

The companies asked that the permit section forbidding dredging within a half mile of the existing shoreline be changed to 1,500 feet.

A requirement that dredgers not move their barges if continuous monitoring equipment breaks might require an operation to shut down over a weekend or holiday until it can notify the state, the dredgers said.

DNR maintains the dredgers have been given home phone numbers of several officials that can be called during non-working hours.

Six environmental organizations filed appeals of the permits Friday.

Also last week the Sierra Club filed a suit challenging state leases to the dredgers.

The granting of the permits "is unreasonable, arbitrary and capricious and is an abuse of discretion," alleges the appeal of the permit, which was filed with DNR Friday afternoon.

The shell dredging permits were well researched and are in full compliance with the state's coastal zone regulations, said Winston Day of DNR.

The petitioners asked that a stay order be issued by the Louisiana Coastal Commission halting dredging operations until it can make a decision on the appeal.

The state's shell reefs provide an important boundary for the state's oil and gas revenues, help to control coastal erosion and provide an important habitat for fish, according to background material submitted with the appeal.

State officials say these issues have been addressed in restrictions included in the leases and permits.

That appeal was filed jointly by Save Our Coast Inc., Concerned Shrimpers of Louisiana, Acadiana Group Sierra Club, Acadiana Redfish Association and Concerned Citizens of Terrebonne's Environment Inc.

In May, Wildlife and Fisheries entered into a lease with Radcliff Materials Inc. and Lake Charles Dredging and Towing Co. allowing them to take shells from certain coastal water bottoms in Vermilion, New Iberia and St. Mary Parishes.

At the same time the department entered into leases with Radcliff Materials Inc., Louisiana Materials Co., Pontchartrain Materials Corp. allowing the companies to take shells from the bottoms of Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas.

In September the department entered into leases with Radcliff Materials Inc., allowing the firm to take shells from certain water bodies in St. Mary, New Iberia and Terrebonne Parishes.

In December DNR granted permits to the companies, but added a number of restrictions to the federal permits which had previously been the only permits the companies needed.

In January DNR issued modified permits which added additional restricted areas and made minor changes in some other restrictions.