Tariffs on Chinese crawfish sought

By M. Scott Morris
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HENDERSON — Members of the Louisiana Crawfish Coalition are scheduled to testify before the office of the U.S. Trade Representative today (Friday) to seek tariffs on Chinese crawfish imports.

Gabe LeBlanc, manager of Acadiana Fishermen's Cooperative in Henderson, and Harold Benoit, director of the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, will request that Chinese crawfish be added to the list of products to face a 100 percent tariff. The proposed tariffs would be in retaliation for alleged copyright violations of U.S. videos and compact discs by Chinese companies.

“We're going to go up there to speak for people like us,” Benoit said. “Chinese crawfish are hurting everybody in (Southwest Louisiana), not just processors and fishermen.”

LeBlanc said the prospect of speaking during the hearing has made him a bit nervous, though he's ready to say his piece. “I'm up to speed on what we want to say. It's just a matter of getting up in front of them and talking,” he said.

Dianne Wildman, spokeswoman for United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, said there are currently $3 billion worth of products on the retaliation list and only $2 billion worth will face sanctions, which are slated to go into effect June 17.

In picking sanctions, Barshefsky will try to cause the most harm to Chinese companies while causing as little harm as possible to U.S. companies, Wildman said.

Max Turnipseed, international consultant for the Louisiana Crawfish Coalition, has said that crawfish imports clearly apply to that standard. However, Wildman said a tariff on textile imports would have a far larger impact.

“Of course anyone can ask to be included on the list as long as you fit the criteria,” Wildman said.

Even if crawfish are included on the list of products for sanctions, there's no guarantee that list will be implemented, and if the list is implemented, there's no guarantee how long sanctions will last.

Lu Wen Xing, press secretary for the Chinese Embassy, said the sanctions will hurt both countries.

“I believe both the U.S. and China are going to try to avoid trade sanctions,” said Xing, adding that sanctions could lead to an escalation that could include other products.

“This is not the way to solve problems. Sanctions go nowhere,” he said.