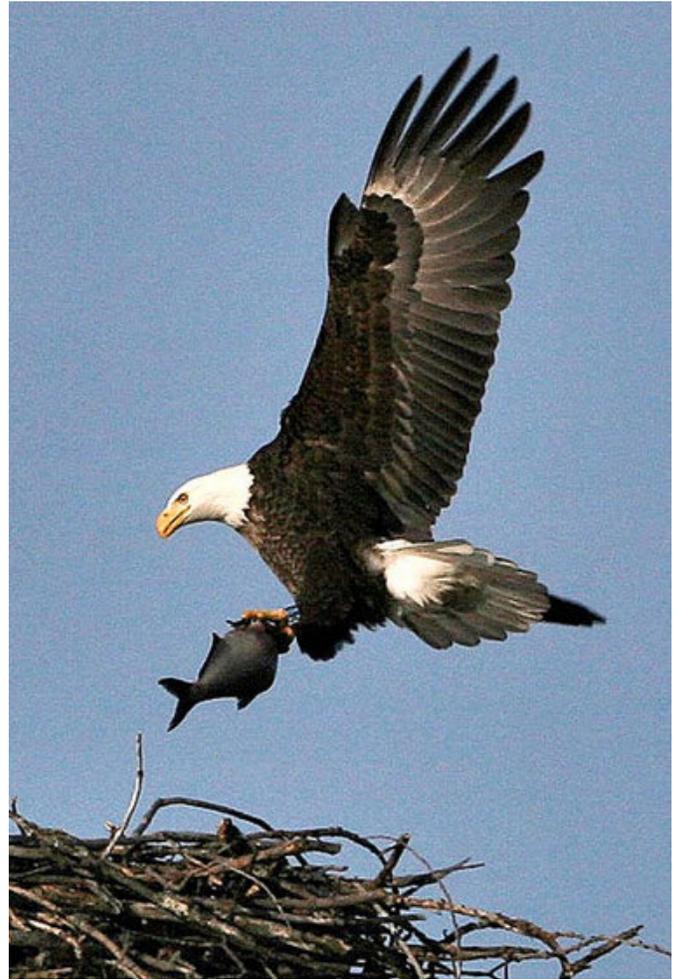


EAGLE BODIES, PARTS FOR INDIAN RITES ARE COLLECTED, SENT FROM COLORADO MORGUE

By ELECTA DRAPER
The Denver Post
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DENVER, CO -- For some Americans, practicing their religion requires a federal permit and a long wait for a controlled substance — eagle parts. The National Eagle Repository, Building 128 at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, is a one-of-a-kind religious-supply house that processes about 2,000 dead golden and bald eagles a year for American Indian rituals.

Under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 and amendments, an eagle may not be taken or killed — not even a loose feather may be picked up. Only dead eagles can be salvaged — and only by the federal government. The bald and golden eagles at the northeast Denver repository have been found dead in the wild, or they come from zoos or licensed rehabilitators. The eagle remains are shipped frozen to the center. "The majority are in bad condition," said supervisor Bernadette Atencio. "These birds come in from all over the country. These birds go out to all over the country."

A two-person staff fills orders for the feathers, heads, talons and whole eagles used by many of the 500 federally recognized American Indian tribes. About 6,000 orders are waiting to be filled at the repository, Atencio said.

"There is a lot of red tape for Native Americans to practice their religion using eagles. It is a very big hindrance," said Myron Pourier, a cultural-affairs official with the South Dakota Oglala Sioux tribe, or Lakota. Demand for the limited supply of eagles is high, especially among Plains, Navajo and Pueblo Indians. "The repository takes a bad rap because of the time it takes to fill an order," Atencio said. "A lot of people don't realize how much work we do to fill an order."



Each plastic bag contains the carcass of a dead eagle. It can half a year just to get a few feathers delivered to the Native American who requested them.

An American Indian who requests a whole bird can wait up to four years after getting a permit. The wait for 10 loose, high-quality feathers is typically six months.

The eagle's role varies from tribe to tribe, but for the Sioux and many others, Pourier said, the eagle is a relative, an older brother, and a direct link to ancestors and to the Creator. The eagle is used in healing and in strengthening ceremonies for warriors, including soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After Indians have received an eagle, they give it a proper blessing — a show of gratitude for its gifts — before sending it on to the spirit world, Pourier said. Before an Indian, who must be 18 or older and enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, can order an eagle or eagle parts, he or she must obtain a permit from their state of residence's Migratory Bird Permit Office. The Colorado office is in Lakewood.

Getting a permit, which is good for a lifetime, can take months or even years. "Everyone in Indian Country agrees the whole process needs to be streamlined," said Don Ragona, an attorney with the Boulder-based Native American Rights Fund. "It's an outrageously long wait."

The repository does not examine the birds it receives for a cause of death. If the West Nile virus is suspected, the bird is not sent to the repository. The staff does not remove maggots or otherwise clean the birds. The recipients do that.

The two specialists who work in the eagle program lay the birds out on stainless-steel tables and examine them from head to claw for usable parts. Whole wings and tails may be used in fans. Tiny ulna bones are sometimes used as whistles. Small pinfeathers might be used on Hopi kachina figures or placed in medicine pouches. The biggest demand is for immature golden-eagle feathers, which are white with black tips.



Specialist Dennis Wiist looks over a dead bald eagle at the repository. Some Indians think the sacred work should be done only by Native Americans.

The repository cuts and mixes parts from different birds but does not mix species. Workers also try to group together parts from birds of a similar age. They fill orders on a first-come, first-served basis and ship once a week. They make 100 to 150 shipments of loose feathers a week. They might ship 30 whole eagles a week. "It's piece work, really," Atencio said. "Some just want the tails. Some just want the wings. A lot of people are holding out for the perfect whole bird. Perfect is hard to come by."

Seeing the national symbol, with a wingspan of up to 8 feet, processed something like poultry is unsettling for some. The clinical approach to handling the birds disturbs many American Indian applicants. "We hear that a lot," Atencio said. "They will ask us if we're Native American. They feel Native Americans should be doing this work here. But anybody can do this job. We have our protocol. Our staff is sensitive."

The repository, Atencio said, works with all types of American Indians, from traditionalists, whose primary concerns might be with blessing and ceremonial burial of the eagle, to modern tribal members, whose concerns are often about the aesthetics of the regalia for dances.

"These birds mean a lot to them," Atencio said of the applicants. "You know that just by talking to them on the phone. They are sincere and humble about what they're asking for."

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 says dead eagles and their parts may only be removed from nature by U.S. Fish and Wildlife officers or by cooperating state game officials. No one — not even American Indians — can sell or barter any part or anything made from eagle parts. They can make a gift of it, or bequeath it upon death, but only to other American Indians. Violations of the act can result in a \$100,000 fine and up to a year in prison, yet there is a thriving black market. If you find a dead bald or golden eagle, do not touch it; report it to a federal or state game official.

FED PERMITS TRIBE TO HUNT BALD EAGLES AMID SHORTAGE OF CARCASSES

By BRANDON RITTIMAN

9 News.com

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DENVER - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently granted a permit for a Native American tribe to hunt two bald eagles, something that's never been allowed before according to the Associated Press. The agency maintains a facility in Denver that serves as the only other legal method for members of federally-recognized tribes to obtain eagle carcasses, feathers, and other parts.

Eagles and their parts are used in a variety of spiritual ceremonies by Native Americans, and tribes historically hunted them for that purpose. While no longer a threatened species, hunting the birds is illegal under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act unless a permit is issued. It is also illegal for people who aren't members of a tribe to possess any part of a Bald or Golden Eagle.

The Denver facility receives more than 6,000 orders each year from all over the country and is only able to fill about a third of those orders. "These eagles are definitely precious to the tribes," Adam Torres, one of the staffers responsible for inspecting and processing carcasses, said.

Wait times can run up to four years depending on the type of eagle. The facility also takes orders for wings and feathers which can be provided in a matter of months. "Of course they get frustrated," the facility's administrator, Bernadette Atencio, said. "Anybody that applies for something that they need would really like to receive it right away."

Even though they are not the national bird, young Golden Eagles are in the highest demand due to the coloration of their tail feathers, which are white with black tips. The supply is limited by the number of eagles found dead around the country. They die being struck by cars, touching power lines, and natural causes.

The hunting permit granted by Fish and Wildlife officials went to the Northern Arapaho Tribe in Wyoming, which did not respond to 9NEWS' calls.

Indian scholars told us they're pleased the government is allowing a hunt in the wild because it shows respect for their culture. Dr. Tink Tinker, a American Indian professor at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, says the hunt won't be done for sport, but carried out as a sacred ritual in which people will be taking the life of a creature they consider a close relative.