

Indian tribe allowed to kill bald eagles for religious reasons

By Tristan Ahtone, NPR

Most Americans have little difficulty practicing their religion. But for Native Americans, performing traditional religious ceremonies isn't always so simple. Many rites often involve heavy regulation by federal authorities – especially when it comes to using sacred items like eagle feathers.

In a first for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Northern Arapaho tribe in Wyoming has received a permit to hunt and kill bald eagles for religious purposes. The move comes in the wake of a lawsuit filed last year, alleging that the refusal of such permits violated tribal members' religious freedom.

The agency has issued similar permits for golden eagles in the past, but the Northern Arapaho permit is the first granted for the iconic bald eagle.

Crawford White, an Arapaho ceremonial elder from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, says his tribe uses eagle-tail fans and eagle-bone whistles in several tribal ceremonies and settings, including sun dances, powwows and sweat lodges.

Some of these ceremonies may sound familiar to non-Native Americans; others may seem more exotic. But either way, for many Native Americans to fully participate in religious ceremonies, they need eagle parts. To get those parts, they can go to the black market, use items passed between friends and family, or put in an order to the National Eagle Repository in Denver.

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