

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
MIGRATORY BIRDS**

Migratory Birds

Part 720 Migratory Bird Management

Chapter 6 Handling and Distribution of Bald and Golden Eagles and Parts

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6.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter establishes:

A. The policy for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees for:

(1) Handling live, sick or injured bald and golden eagles, and

(2) Transferring dead eagles to the proper authorities and recipients while ensuring important information is collected and properly recorded; and

B. The *Eagle Handling and Distribution Handbook (Handbook)* as the procedural guide that Service employees must use when they encounter sick or injured bald or golden eagles, dead bald or golden eagles, or eagle parts.

6.2 What are the authorities for this chapter?

A. Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act ([16 U.S.C. 668](#)).

B. Migratory Bird Treaty Act ([16 U.S.C. 703-712](#)).

C. Eagle Permits ([50 CFR 22](#)).

D. Migratory Bird Permits ([50 CFR 21](#)).

E. [Policy Concerning Distribution of Eagle Feathers for Native American Religious Purposes](#), Presidential Memorandum; April 29, 1994.

6.3 What terms do you need to know to understand this chapter?

A. A freshly dead eagle has no smell, no fly larvae are present, the eyes are not sunken in, and the body is usually intact and has not been scavenged.

B. The Injury and Mortality Reporting (IMR) system is an online database within the Service's Environmental Conservation Online System (ECOS). It allows Service employees and others to report and access bird mortality and injury information (particularly eagle information) in a centralized location and standardized manner.

C. The National Eagle Repository (NER) is a Service facility in Colorado. It's the central location for the receipt, storage, and distribution of bald and golden eagles that are found dead, and their parts. The NER receives parts from a variety of sources, and distributes them to members of federally recognized tribes for religious purposes. In rare circumstances, and only with the approval of the Director, a Regional Director, or the Chief – Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), the NER may distribute eagles to others (see section 6.7).

D. The National Forensic Laboratory is a Service facility that examines, identifies, and compares evidence using a wide range of scientific procedures and instruments. The staff attempt to link suspect, victim, and crime scene with physical evidence.

E. The National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) is a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) facility that receives fresh dead eagles to evaluate them for avian disease and to determine the cause of death. The NWHC takes precautions to minimize damage to dead eagles during the necropsy process. After NWHC completes the necropsy, it sends dead bald and golden eagles and useable parts to the NER.

F. The Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS), affiliated with the University of

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Georgia, also receives fresh dead eagles to evaluate them for avian disease and to determine the cause of death. They also take precautions to minimize damage during the necropsy process and send the remains and useable parts to the NER.

G. Service law enforcement officer, in this chapter, means both Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) Special Agents and National Wildlife Refuge System Federal Wildlife Officers.

6.4 What is the Service policy for handling injured or dead bald and golden eagles?

A. Employees must follow the policy in this chapter and the procedures in the *Handbook* if they encounter injured or dead eagles so that the Service can:

- (1) Facilitate the delivery of dead eagles and eagle parts, whenever possible, to the NER for distribution to members of federally recognized tribes for religious use;
- (2) Ensure injured or sick eagles are quickly and safely transferred to a licensed veterinarian or federally permitted professional for care, and to facilitate collection of data on their condition and disposition;
- (3) Identify and rectify significant eagle mortality sources, such as poisonings, disease, areas of common vehicle collisions, or areas of common electrocutions; and
- (4) Improve cumulative effects assessments and analysis, helping us and our partners to manage and sustain eagle populations more efficiently and effectively.

B. Most Service employees in the Regions may, under a Regional permit, handle sick, injured, or dead eagles. They must refer to the specific permit for their Region for authorizations and conditions. For more information on this, refer to the *Handbook's* section, "Legal Authority of Service Staff, the Public, Partners and Others to Handle Eagles."

6.5 What are the general procedures employees must follow?

A. Reporting of sick, injured, or dead eagles:

- (1) Promptly report sick, injured, or dead eagles to a Service law enforcement officer to determine whether the eagle can be handled or collected, or whether it should remain undisturbed pending further investigation. Service law enforcement contact information is included in the *Handbook*. If further investigation is not warranted, follow the procedures in the "Documentation," "Collection," and "Transfer" sections of the *Handbook*.
- (2) If you can't contact an officer in person or on the phone, follow the guidance on how to proceed with sick, injured, and dead eagles under such circumstances in the "Reporting" section of the *Handbook*.
- (3) Assist other individuals, agencies, and partners who encounter sick, injured, or dead eagles or eagle parts to familiarize them with the information and protocols in this policy and the associated *Handbook*, in accordance with their permit conditions. Any individual that handles an eagle or its parts must either be covered by a migratory bird permit or under a permit exception (see [50 CFR 21.12](#) and the *Handbook* for more information).

B. Collection and transfer of dead eagles: Protocols for the proper collection and transfer of eagle remains are covered in the "Collection" and "Transfer" sections of the *Handbook*.

- (1) Service employees must transfer dead bald and golden eagles or eagle parts to one of the following places:

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- (a) The USGS's NWHC in Madison, Wisconsin;
- (b) The SCWDS at the University of Georgia;
- (c) The Service's NER in Colorado;
- (d) The Service's National Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon (only Service law enforcement officers will ship eagles to this laboratory); or
- (e) Other approved laboratories as necessary and appropriate (see "List of Other Approved Laboratories" in the *Handbook*).

(2) Where the eagle or eagle parts are sent depends on several factors. To determine where to send a dead bald or golden eagle or eagle parts, Service employees must refer to the *Handbook's* section on "Transfer."

C. Documentation of information regarding injured or dead eagles: Protocols for the proper documentation of handling eagles is covered in the "Documentation" section of the *Handbook*.

(1) Service employees must record information regarding sick, injured, or dead eagles (or eagle parts) in the Service's IMR system, or a compatible database where there is a process to periodically transfer the data into the IMR system.

(2) The *Handbook* includes detailed information on how to use the IMR system.

(3) Although all injury and mortality information is important, we have a particular interest in collecting and tracking information about eagles found in certain conditions or under certain circumstances. Refer to the "Recording Documentation Data" section of the *Handbook* for guidance on incidents of particular interest for data collection.

6.6 What should you do if you find or receive a dead eagle equipped with a radio or a telemetry device, or one that is wearing a Federal leg band or color marker?

A. When there's a radio or telemetry device attached (usually on a backpack harness and resting in the middle of the eagle's back): Follow the "Protocol for the Handling of Golden Eagles Marked with Tracking Devices" or the "Protocol for the Handling of Bald Eagles Marked with Tracking Devices" in the *Handbook*.

B. When the eagle is wearing a leg band or color marker: Report information on the band recovery to the Bird Banding Laboratory through [USGS's Web site](#). Important information on the location and time of death can be lost if bands are not reported immediately. In addition, report information about the eagle (or its remains) in the Service's IMR system or a compatible database following the guidance in the "Documentation" section of the *Handbook*.

6.7 How does the Service distribute eagles and eagle parts?

A. Distribution of eagles to Native American tribes:

(1) The NER receives, evaluates, stores, and distributes dead bald and golden eagles and eagle parts (including feathers).

(2) The Service's highest priority for distribution of eagles or eagle parts is to Native Americans enrolled in

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federally recognized tribes in the United States for religious purposes. Beginning in 1994, with President Clinton's "Policy Concerning Distribution of Eagle Feathers for Native American Religious Purposes" (59 FR 22953), it is the responsibility of all Federal land managing agencies, including the Department of the Interior, to ensure expedited delivery of eagles and eagle parts to the NER whenever possible.

(3) We handle live eagles in accordance with the Migratory Bird Permit Memorandum ([MBPM-6](#)) concerning distribution of live, non-releasable eagles. This means that if an eagle is cared for by a federally permitted rehabilitator, and it cannot be released to the wild, we should make it available to tribal eagle aviaries before other qualified facilities.

(4) Native Americans must complete an application to receive dead eagles and eagle parts from the NER (see [NER's Web site](#) for more information).

(5) The NER distributes dead eagles and eagle parts in the order in which they receive the requests.

B. Distribution of eagle remains to non-tribal entities:

(1) Because distribution of dead eagles (or eagle parts) to tribes is our highest priority, we should send all dead eagle and parts to the NER prior to distribution elsewhere. However, we may distribute, through the NER, eagle remains that are undesirable or unsuitable for distribution to Native Americans to public museums, public scientific societies, and public zoological parks for scientific or educational purposes. The NER determines what remains and parts are unsuitable and distributes these upon request as they are available.

(2) If eagle remains are requested for scientific or educational purposes, the Service Regional Migratory Bird Permit Office (RMBPO) should handle these requests as follows:

(a) The RMPBO should refer anyone who requests such remains to the NER to determine if NER has any eagle items available for scientific or educational purposes.

(b) If the NER has items available, then the person making the request must already have or obtain an eagle exhibition or eagle scientific collecting permit (see [50 CFR 22.21](#)) from a Service RMBPO. The RMBPO will coordinate filling the permit's authorization with the NER.

C. Transfer of dead eagles or eagle parts held under an eagle exhibition or scientific collecting permit to another entity:

(1) RMBPO staff must manage placement of these permitted eagle items as they become available to other qualified institutions, to the NER, or to the National Wildlife Property Repository (NWPR) for educational purposes.

(2) The RMBPO that issued the permit for possession must provide guidance on the transfer of the dead eagle or eagle parts.

6.8 How should Service employees work with other government agencies in handling eagle remains? You should inform employees of other agencies of the importance of:

A. Following the appropriate steps for reporting found in the *Handbook*, including promptly reporting eagle deaths, sickness, or injuries to a Service law enforcement officer.

B. Following the appropriate steps found in the *Handbook* for documentation and collection of eagles, including recording eagle injury or mortality discoveries in the Service's IMR system, especially if the conditions of particular interest we refer to in the *Handbook* apply, and coordinating with the Service's

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National Raptor Coordinator to share data if they are collecting data in another database.

C. Following the appropriate steps found in the *Handbook* for transfer of eagles, including:

- (1) Making an effort to ensure that dead eagles or eagle parts that meet NER criteria are delivered as quickly as possible to the NER. This includes informing employees of other agencies that the NER pays for shipping to the facility in Colorado, and assisting them in following the appropriate preparation protocols for shipping to the NER that we describe in the *Handbook*.
- (2) Making sure dead eagles and eagle parts that Service law enforcement does not take custody of, but that may qualify for transfer to a laboratory for further testing, do not go directly to the NER. Employees of other agencies should work with Service staff to determine the appropriate destination for these eagles.
- (3) Ensuring that after an investigation or lab analysis concludes, that those in custody of the remains know the steps for transferring dead eagles and eagle parts to the NER.

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ACTING DIRECTOR

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