

Caring for Eagle Feathers

Feathers acquired from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation:

These feathers come from living Eagles cared for at the CPN Aviary. Most of the Eagles are permanent residents who were injured and are unable to be released back into the wild. These Eagles require long-term permanent housing or they face euthanasia. Offering these Eagles a permanent home and caring for these Eagles allows us to collect naturally molted feathers during the early spring and summer months. The feathers collected will be prayed over and smoked off before being sent to the applicants.

Single feathers can have a beaded wooden handle, or a loop of leather strip tied on them with each end of the leather strip paralleled up on each side of the feather quill end, loop down, wrapped in red yarn all the way down the quill end onto the leather, and tied off. The loop can then be used to tie the feather onto a flag or regalia - or simply as a handle. Single feathers may be combined to create a fan and have a beaded wooden handle as well. Loose feathers should be stored in a cedar box to keep them away from moths. Instruct any others who receive feathers from you that they should be kept clean, away from animals, especially dogs, and smoked regularly. They should be told the story of the Eagle delivering the message to the Creator that there are still faithful on the Earth (prayer smoke rising) that it should not be destroyed by cold from the sun not rising. That is why we fan the smoke up with an eagle feather when we bless a place or pray with smoke - the eagle is delivering the message, and the Earth is saved another day. If feathers are dropped or dishonored in any way, they should be prayed over and smoked off. Only people of

sufficient age to assume the responsibilities of ownership should have eagle feathers. The old traditions say that a young woman from the time of ovulation through menstruation is carrying the ability to make life, and manifests a spirit gift from the Creator that is stronger than her feathers. For this reason, it is said that the respectful behavior to her feathers is to limit her use of them during that time. This is a personal matter best left to the discretion of the feather owner, but a new owner should be told of the matter.

Men should never use their feathers when a new life is being created.

Feathers acquired from the Federal Repository:

If you receive feathers from the Fish and Wildlife Service, they may have been frozen and thawed. The eagle will most likely have been killed in the wild and have been exposed to the elements for some time, putting them in a state of decay. In some instances you may receive a whole bird. The wings and tail are the portions used for ceremony. The balance of the bird you do not use and should always be disposed of in a respectful way through ceremony. You need to put tobacco down in a private place where a fire can be started. Pray for guidance from the Creator in using these feathers. Smoke yourself and all who assist in the ceremony.

Remember that the eagle is the creature of the Winged Nation in our tradition that delivers the message each dawn to the Creator, that prayer smoke still rises from the lodges of the Nishnabe – shows the Creator that there are still faithful on this Earth. Because of the existence of the faithful, the Creator makes the sun rise and the Great Circle of Life goes on another day.

After placing cedar on the ground around the fire pit, start a fire with flint and steel where the tobacco was placed, burn sage and fan the smoke all over the remains of the bird. Then place the remains on the fire with cedar, sage, tobacco and sweet grass. Burn as much as possible, bury the ashes and bones that remain in the ground at a depth where other animals will not dig them up. Offer a prayer in each of the four directions, and then thank the spirit of the eagle you now carry. Keep dogs away from the eagle parts, ceremony, and feathers.

Remove all flesh from the feather tips and dispose of it as you have disposed of the other remains of the bird. Any fluff or small feathers from the wings not used in you fan should be disposed of in the same manner.

If you are making an eagle feather fan, use the portion from the outer joint up (less all but seven of the round ended feathers), stripping the flesh and skin from the outer joint back to the shoulder joint. The bone (about 4" that will be in the handle) should be cut and bored out to remove the marrow, and braced into a straight position with a wood splint to elongate the angle at which the handle will be relative to the fan. Place the entire splinted bone structure end of the fan into desiccant (Twenty Mule Team Borax works very well or commercial desiccant is available from a taxidermy supply company) and leave for seven days. The bone end should be free from putrid flesh odor by then or it has not been well cleaned. I usually put the entire fan under a layer of desiccant in a long box. Carve the handle from cedar, split into two halves with a place for the bone carved into each inner face of the two halves. Put the two halves together and bind with sinew or leather twine. Cover the wood with a sewn rawhide leather cover reversed onto the wood after sewing and allowed to shrink. Decorate to your satisfaction with beading. I hang a small Megis shell from the

upper beading on my handle. You should store and care for a fan in the same manner as single or loose feathers.

Thank you for carrying on our traditions.

Chairman Barrett