

Caring for Eagle Feathers

Feathers acquired from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation 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 them allows us to collect naturally molted feathers each year during the early spring and summer months. Once collected, these feathers are cleaned, if necessary, and prepared for dispersal to tribal members. The feathers are taken care of in a respectful Neshnabé way and are prayed over, smudged and sorted into cedar storage before they are sent to the applicants. When you receive your feathers, you should smudge them along with yourself and ask the Creator, Mamogosan, for guidance in using these feathers. Offer a prayer to each of the four directions, and then thank the spirit of the eagle you now carry. Feathers should be kept in a cedar box to protect them from the elements when not being used.

Feathers acquired from the Fish and Wildlife Services' National Eagle Repository, or Federal Repository, have almost certainly been frozen and thawed. The eagle was likely killed in the wild and exposed to the elements for some time. In some instances, you may receive a whole bird. The wings and tail are the portions used for ceremony. The balance of the bird is generally not used 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 Mamogosan in using these feathers. Smudge yourself and all who assist in the ceremony. Remember that the eagle is a creature of the Winged Nation in our tradition that delivers the message each dawn to Mamogosan. That prayer smoke still rises from the lodges of the Neshnabé – shows Mamogosan that there are still faithful on this Earth. Because of the existence of the faithful, Mamogosan 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 our four sacred medicines: 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 they will not be disturbed. Offer a prayer in each of the four directions, and then thank the spirit of the eagle you now carry.