Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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American Indians, who still prize eagle feathers for ceremonial status, are joining the fight to save the national bird from extinction. The Red Lake Band of the Chippewa Tribe has designated its 400,000-acre reservation in north-central Minnesota as a Bald Eagle Sanctuary.

The Chippewa lands are on an important eagle migration route and have several active nests. Rare except in Alaska, bald eagles are one of the species Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall has designated for management and study under the Endangered Species Act of 1966.

The sanctuary will be dedicated May 12 in ceremonies that also signal the completion of a wildlife marsh restoration project on the reservation.

Other species of wildlife -- waterfowl, muskrats, and minks -- will also enjoy protection under the Red Lake marsh project covering 8,300 acres.

Restoration of the marshes began in 1965 with a $380,000 project of the Accelerated Public Works program. The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife directed the undertaking, which diverted water from the Clearwater River to cover 5,000 acres of drained land.

More recently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed restoration of another 3,300 acres of marshes bordering the Red Lake River channel, at a cost of $176,000.

Wild rice production -- both for wildlife feed and for harvesting has already begun. An estimated 150,000 pounds of wild rice will be harvested annually on the restored marshes.

Hunting and trapping, traditional occupations of the Chippewas, together with wild rice sales, are expected to bring about $100,000 income each year to the tribe.

And then, there’ll be the eagle feathers. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has a standing order from some Indian tribes for feathers of eagles that die in the sanctuary. Donation of the feathers is permissible as long as they are used only for ceremonial purposes.