Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Ada E. Deer, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (the Service) within the Department of the Interior, carried out Federal search and arrest warrants in the four corners area (New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah) today. This federal action is a culmination of a two-year undercover investigation which has been conducted by the Service, into the killing and selling of eagles and other protected migratory birds.

The warrants were executed in cooperation with tribal and BIA Law Enforcement Officials. "Thirty-five individuals and businesses will be charged with selling protected migratory bird parts," the Service states. "It is very tragic that wildlife is slaughtered in this manner for commercial purposes. More arrests will take place on the Navajo Nation today," Ms. Deer says. "The Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Navajo Nation is assisting the Service in this effort."

Estimates are that some eagle parts may sell for as much as $850.00 to $1,000.00. This has made illegal trafficking very lucrative and indications are that because of increased popularity and demand this illegal activity may become more attractive. The Bald Eagle Protection Act of June 8, 1940, amended for eagle parts in 1962 (16 U.S.C. 668 et seq.), prohibits the taking, possession, sale, purchase or transportation of bald eagles, their parts or feathers and provides for a narrow exemption for religious purposes of Indian tribes. Individual American Indians may obtain eagle parts if they are members of a federally recognized Indian tribe, have a federal permit issued by the Service and obtain eagle feathers or other parts from the National Eagle Repository near Denver, Colorado.

"I applaud the actions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services in this enforcement endeavor," Ms. Deer says. Individuals charged in these arrests will be prosecuted by the federal government as opposed to the State or tribe. If convicted they may be sentenced to up to two years in prison and/or fined up to $250,000 per offense.