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Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today issued a policy statement concerning Indian cultural and religious use of migratory bird feathers and parts. Following is the text of the statement.

"I am aware that American Indians are presently experiencing uncertainty and confusion over the application of Federal bird protection laws to Indian cultural and religious activities. Apparently, this confusion and concern may have resulted, in part, from this Department's enforcement activities under such laws. This statement is intended to clarify the Department of the Interior's responsibilities and intentions, and to ease the minds of American Indians.

"The Department of the Interior recognizes the unique heritage of American Indian culture. It also recognizes that American Indians have a legitimate interest in expressing their cultural and religious way of life. At the same time, both the Department of the Interior and American Indians share an additional responsibility to conserve wildlife resources, including federally protected birds.

"As a result of meetings between agencies of the Department of the Interior, the Association for American Indian Cultural and Traditional Activities, and others, I can assure American Indians that our policy is to permit them to engage in the following activities without fear of Federal prosecution, harassment, or other interference.

"1. American Indians may possess, carry, use, wear, give, loan, or exchange among other Indians, without compensation, all federally protected birds, as well as their parts or feathers."

2. American Indians who wish to possess bird feathers or parts to be worked on by tribal craftsmen for eventual use in Indian religious or cultural activities may transfer such feathers or parts to tribal craftsmen without charge, but such craftsmen may be compensated for their work.

"However, the Department of the Interior will continue to enforce against all persons those Federal laws prohibiting the killing, buying or selling of eagles, migratory birds, or endangered species, as well as those laws prohibiting the buying or selling of the parts or feathers of such birds and animals.

"I encourage American Indians to express their identity and to freely pursue their cultural and religious practices. At the same time, I encourage them to support the purposes of the Federal bird protection laws. There is much work to be accomplished to further clarify the rights and obligations of American Indians with respect to Federal bird protection laws, and special efforts will be made to conduct a two-way education process between Government employees and Indian communities. In addition, we have agreed to work in a spirit of cooperation with the Association for American Indian Cultural and Traditional Activities, and other interested Indian representatives, in order to harmonize the policies, practices, and procedures for enforcement of the Federal bird protection laws with the legitimate needs of Indians. This includes review of Federal regulations, with probable changes where the legitimate needs of American Indians can be legally recognized without harming federally protected birds.

"In this regard, one area of discussion should be the possibility of American Indians sharing with

Federal officials the responsibilities of wildlife management and enforcement through the adoption of tribal ordinances designed to conserve federally protected birds.

"In the past, one problem has been that legitimate sources of feathers, which might have been available to the Department for distribution to American Indians, have not been fully utilized. We are presently developing better procedures to collect and distribute eagle feathers from the Fish and Wildlife Service repository at Pocatello, Idaho, where feathers of eagles found dead are stored. In addition, we will make an effort to distribute the feathers and parts of other migratory birds to Indians.

"I hope that this statement will help to take away the uncertainty and confusion presently experienced by American Indians. I hope also that our efforts will encourage tradition, culture, and religious activities among American Indians, while at the same time promoting a mutual effort to protect and conserve federally regulated birds.

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