

Around the Region

Eagle aviary proposed for feathers

PENDLETON (AP) – Tribal members who need eagle feathers for religious and ceremonial purposes often face a long wait.

“The current process for tribal members to secure eagle feathers is to apply to the National Eagle Repository,” said Carl Scheeler, Wildlife Program Manager for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. “The waiting time can be up to a year.”

A proposed eagle aviary in Pendleton could dramatically decrease the wait.

The facility, hinging on a \$200,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, would house up to 12 non-releasable birds. The CTUIR will learn the fate of its grant proposal sometime after the president signs the Department of the Interior budget in the early months of 2014.

The aviary, the first in the Pacific Northwest, would be near Pendleton’s McKay Reservoir at Blue Mountain Wildlife. The organization rehabilitates sick or injured wildlife, mainly birds of prey such as eagles, owls and hawks.

“We take in more raptors than anywhere else in the Pacific Northwest,” said Lynn Tompkins, the director at Blue Mountain Wildlife.

Tompkins and Scheeler started championing the idea of a tribal eagle aviary years ago as a speedier way to procure eagle feathers. Though Blue Mountain takes in about

a dozen eagles every year, Tompkins cannot provide molted feathers or other eagle parts to local tribe members. All feathers and bodies of dead eagles go to the federal repository in Denver, Colo., even if they were found on local tribal land.

“We don’t currently have the option of securing local birds for use by the local community,” Scheeler said. “They must go to the national repository for the next person on the list.”

The CTUIR plan includes a 30-by-50-foot flight pen and a rodent-rearing facility at Blue Mountain Wildlife and a feather repository located at the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute in Pendleton. The tribal repository would include a “super-cool” freezer to kill parasites before storage and distribution of feathers.

“We need a place to safely curate and store the feathers,” Scheeler said. “The secure facilities at Tamastlikt were an obvious choice.”

Tompkins and Scheeler said only non-releasable eagles, birds that would die in the wild, would populate the tribal aviary. Sadly, they said, there is no shortage of those.

“It seems there is no end to the number of injured birds that come into Blue Mountain Wildlife,” Scheeler said.

Tompkins stood in the facility’s current eagle flight pen Monday with about 10 injured eagles flapping and

perching around her. The pen is smaller by half than the proposed one and has a netting ceiling, instead of wood and beam. The iconic birds come here for a variety of reasons, she said. Some fly into wind turbines or power lines. Others collide with cars, are shot or ingest lead.

The grant would provide funding for public education about eagles, addressing such topics as how lead affects the birds. The high number of lead poisoned birds saddens Tompkins and Scheeler. The birds often feed on gut piles or carcasses left by hunters who use lead shot or lead bullets.

“They are leaving animals that are toxic,” Tompkins said. “They are putting out poison.”

The education piece would also address how the eagle feather is intertwined with tribal culture and faith. If a feather falls from the bustle or headpiece of a native dancer, it can bring a powwow to sudden halt, triggering a special retrieval ceremony.

Teara Farrow Ferman, manager of CTUIR’s Cultural Resources Protection Program, said the feathers appear in dance regalia, ceremonies and in homes and cars as protection. In wedding ceremonies, a woman receives two feathers just before the couple is officially joined as husband and wife.

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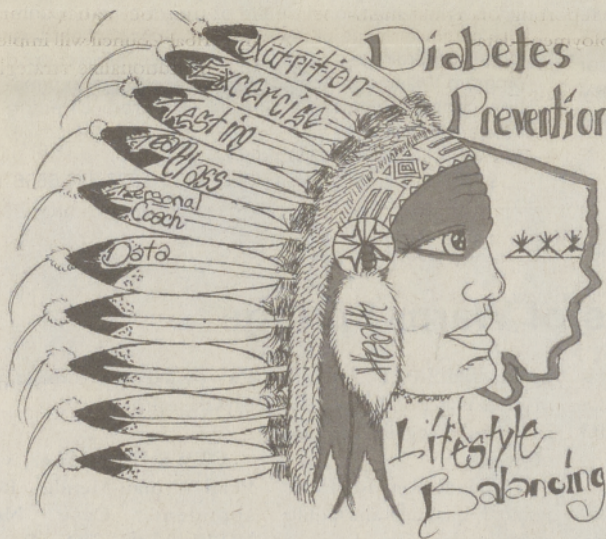
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