



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington D.C. 20240



In Reply, Refer To
FWS/AMB/077276

Dr. Julie Thorstenson, PhD
NAFWS Executive Director
10465 Melody Drive, Suite 307
Northglenn, CO 8034

Dear Dr. Thorstenson:

Thank you for sharing your concerns, on behalf of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, about the distribution of eagle feathers and parts given the current Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak across North America. We are sensitive to the fact that the reduction in the number of eagles available, due to HPAI, is negatively impacting cultural and traditional practices of Native American and Alaska Native Tribes. We are making every effort possible to continue the timely distribution of eagle feathers and parts to Tribal members requesting them; however, the safety of Tribal members and our staff at the National Eagle Repository (NER) is our top priority.

Currently, the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Health Office, is providing HPAI testing services to the NER to screen all eagles received at the facility. Those eagles that test negative for HPAI can safely be distributed to Tribal members. Options for the decontamination of HPAI-positive eagle remains and parts will need to be further explored by the NER. Unfortunately, the NER does not have this capacity given current staffing and funding constraints.

Specific to your four questions, here are our responses:

1. Will a 5-10% Chlorine (Cl) bath/spray inactivate the HPAI virus on eagle feathers?
Understanding it is not for the entire carcass.
 - At this time, the World Organization for Animal Health recommends the following methods to ensure the destruction of avian influenza virus in feathers: washing and steam-drying at 100°C for 30 minutes, fumigation with formalin (10% formaldehyde) for 8 hours, or irradiation with a dose of 20 kilogram.
2. Is the Ethylene Oxide (EtO) autoclave process an option for decontamination and/or will it compromise the integrity of eagle feathers?
 - At this time, the World Organization for Animal Health has only recommended the method mentioned above to ensure the destruction of avian influenza and has

not provided guidance for the use of an Ethylene Oxide autoclave process. If that decontamination process changes, we will be sure to communicate that to you and coordinate further.

3. Will guidance and protocols be established for the handling and processing for Tribal aviary/rehabilitation personnel in the event that a bird tests positive for HPAI in their facilities?
 - Guidance and protocols for aviary and rehabilitation personnel has been developed by both the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (URL: <https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/2816/4943/1891/AFWA2022HPAIWildlifeRehabGuidance-April2022.pdf>) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (URL: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/ac-tech-note-captive-wild-bird-biosecurity-508.pdf) with input from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
4. Will there be a protocol set forth for Tribal personnel to be able to perform the testing for HPAI in the field? Is there the capacity for all personnel to do this testing or is this strictly a USDA and DOI activity?
 - At this time, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services and USGS National Wildlife Health Center are leading the national federal response to HPAI testing. To our knowledge, there are no protocols in place for anyone to test for HPAI in the field. We encourage you to contact these agencies to inquire about possible expansion of testing to other agencies/organizations and the future of field testing.

We acknowledge the importance of eagle feathers and parts to Tribal culture and traditional practices and look forward to the continued collaboration with Tribes as we all navigate a process to move forward during this HPAI outbreak. Thank you again for reaching out to us with your concerns. Please contact Jerome Ford, Assistant Director for the Migratory Birds program (703-358-2606 / jerome_ford@fws.gov), if you have further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Martha Williams
Director