



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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March 17, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **ED WINDDANCER SENTENCED TO \$5,000 FINE AND 5 YEAR'S PROBATION FOR POSSESSING AND TRADING AMERICAN BALD EAGLE FEATHERS**

*Nashville, TN - March 17, 2008* - Ed Yarbrough, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee and Steve Middleton, Resident Agent in Charge of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Nashville Office, announced today that Ed Winddancer, 51, of Port Charlotte, Florida was sentenced yesterday to a fine of \$5,000 and 5 years of probation for illegally possessing and trading feathers of American bald and golden eagles.

Mr. Winddancer was arrested in Cookeville, Tennessee in July, 2005 after he traded feathers of American bald and golden eagles and other protected migratory birds to an undercover agent of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in exchange for feathers and parts of other protected wildlife species. Mr. Winddancer also was found to possess more than 1,000 feathers and other parts of various wildlife species. Mr. Winddancer performed Native American dances and music for pow wows, civic groups, schools and summer camps. He used feathers and other wildlife parts to decorate his Native American regalia.

The possession of American bald and golden eagle feathers, without a permit, is prohibited by the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Laws specifically protecting our national symbol, the American bald eagle, were first enacted in 1940, prompted by the widespread shooting of bald eagles and concern in Congress that survival of the species was imperilled. The decline of bald eagle populations likely started shortly after European settlement of North America. Eagles and other predators were perceived by early settlers as competitors and a threat to livestock. Eagles were shot, trapped and poisoned for that reason. Widespread use of the pesticide, DDT, from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s, also contributed to the decline in bald eagle populations.

By 1963, surveys coordinated by the National Audubon Society found only 417 nesting pairs of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. In 1967, the Secretary of the Interior listed bald eagles south of the 40th parallel as endangered under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966. In 1972, eagles also were included for protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In that same year, most uses for DDT were banned in the United States.

These federal efforts to save the American bald eagle have been successful. Eagle populations throughout North America began to rebound in the mid-1970s. By 1997, an estimated 5,000 nesting pairs of bald eagles inhabited the lower 48 states. By 2006, that estimate had grown to 7,700. In 1995, bald eagles were reclassified from “endangered” to “threatened.” In June of 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the threatened species list. However, the protections of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act remain in effect to assure that the American bald eagle continues as a living symbol of our country.

“All Americans can help protect bald eagles by obeying the laws that prohibit possession of eagle feathers without a permit,” United States Attorney Ed Yarbrough said. “This possession prohibition was intended by Congress to diminish demand for eagle feathers and other parts and thus reduce the pressure to poach bald eagles that remains a threat to the survival of the species. Existing permit procedures administered by the Department of the Interior assure that eagle feathers are available to Native Americans for use in Native American religious ceremonies, while also assuring the survival of this important national symbol for all Americans.”

This case was investigated by agents from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Assistant United States Attorney Byron Jones represented the United States.

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All photos are taken by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service -- "Eagle feathers taken in Winddancer case."

