Eagles are an important part of America's culture, nationally symbolizing strength, courage, and freedom. While they are beautiful and amazing to look at when alive, what happens to these regal birds after they pass away?

It's actually illegal for any individual to possess a bald or golden eagle, including any of its parts (feathers, feet, beak, etc.) when they die. Because of this, a one-of-a-kind facility exists in Colorado, where deceased eagles are transported to.

The National Eagle Repository is the federal government's official dead eagle processing center. The building serves as a central location for the receipt, storage, and distribution of bald and golden eagles that are found dead throughout the United States, as well as their various parts. The repository accepts dead bald and golden eagles from federal rehabilitators, zoological parks, federal and state conservation agencies, and other sources across the country.

When the eagles' bodies arrive at the repository, a small team works on processing and evaluating them. After examination, some of the birds' remains are sent to licensed Native Americans who use them for ceremonial and religious purposes.

Native Americans and Alaska Natives have used eagle feathers for religious and cultural purposes for hundreds of years. The repository provides a legal means for Native Americans to acquire eagle feathers.

There's a strict process in which federally recognized tribes must go about obtaining bald or golden eagle parts. Registered Native American tribes send their request for parts to the repository, and then receive the remains back in the mail. These requests are filled on a first come first serve basis by date of application.

The relationship between the repository and Native American tribes also reduces the pressure for these birds to be taken from the wild, which protects the species as a whole.

The repository was established in the early 1970s by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It's currently operated and managed by the Office of Law Enforcement, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The facility is located in the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Commerce City.