

Supreme Court to rule on religious use of eagle feathers

The United States Supreme Court agreed October 15 to decide whether Indian treaty rights to hunt on reservations took precedence over the Bald Eagle Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The court will review a lower court decision allowing the Yankton Sioux Indians of South Dakota to hunt the eagles for use in religious rituals.

The case originated with a 1981

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service undercover operation that led to the conviction of tribal member Dwight Dion, Sr. and others for violating federal laws protecting the birds. An appeals court ruled the Indians had rights, dating from an 1851 treaty, to hunt the birds for tribal uses on tribal lands.

The U.S. Justice Department has appealed this ruling, saying that treaty rights do not extend to hunting a species to extinction.