



MEDIA RELEASE

Rain Unlikely To Put A Clamp On Devil's Claw Festival

Recent rain has failed to dampen the spirits of organisers for this year's Devil's Claw Festival at Gregory National Park, about 200km west of Katherine.

Victoria River District chief district ranger Garry Fischer said the planned May 2 to May 12 festival would take place, depending on this weekend's weather.

"We are quietly confident the festival will begin on Tuesday as planned because water levels in and around the park are continually dropping and the Victoria Highway should be accessible from tomorrow," Mr Fischer said.

"It looks like the rain shouldn't be an issue for us, so we are contacting all our registered volunteers today to let them know what the latest situation is and at this stage we are not planning to postpone the festival."

The Devil's Claw Festival is an annual event dating back to the early 1990s aimed at eventually eradicating this noxious weed.

The weed is a bushy herb, native to Africa that grows to about two metres tall.

The most effective and environmentally-safe way of eradicating it is through hand removal after initial aerial spraying more than 10 years ago reduced its numbers in the park.

Mr Fischer said about five volunteers along with Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and locally employed ranger groups were expected to participate in this year's festival that would continue to build on past successes.

"It was common to find around 20,000 devil's claw plants in Gregory National Park a bit over 10 years ago but this number has regularly been less than 1000 the past few years," Mr Fischer said.

"But the spread of devil's claw depends quite heavily on the weather and the solid work of volunteers and that is why we are keen to build on the past efforts and ensure this year's festival goes ahead as planned after the very good wet season we have just experienced.

"Only when a weed is not found in a particular area for at least seven years is it deemed to be eradicated."

Trials undertaken on the park by Parks and Wildlife Service rangers are helping determine how long viable seeds may remain in the soil.

Ends

Media Note _ For more information contact Garry Fischer on 8975 0936

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