



Rare wallaby aims for return to Grampians

By NICOLE HEINRICH

A RARE wallaby species could soon be back in the Grampians.

A recovery team has begun a program to breed the endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby and return the species to sites in the Grampians National Park and East Gippsland in 2006.

Grampians National Park head ranger Graham Parkes said the team was looking at eventual reintroduction sites for the wallaby as part of the project.

"The Grampians is a possible site for the program but there are no final plans," he told the Mail-Times on Friday.

Mr Parkes said the brush-tailed rock wallaby was Victoria's most endangered mammal.

"It's thought there are not many left in Victoria — possibly fewer than 10 are in the wild," he said.

"We have had brush-tailed rock wallabies here in the past and we now have in place excellent pest animal control programs, particularly for fox control, that would make reintroduction potentially a lot more successful here."

Mr Parkes said a recovery team would develop a reintroduction plan and strategy during the next two years. The program would be sped up if breeding produced numbers that demanded a quicker release.

He said there had been no recent sightings of the brush-tailed rock wallaby in the Grampians.

"The last one was sighted here in late 1999," he said.

He said the wallabies lived at a very small number of sites generally around the Snowy River in East Gippsland.

"Currently the fox appears to be the wallaby's most serious

predator in the Grampians," he said.

Recovery team member Peter Kambouris from Parks Victoria in East Gippsland said the reintroduction and captive breeding program was already starting to pay off.

"Through the captive breeding program, we are maintaining gene diversity," he said.

"We take a young joey from a mother's pouch and then she'll reproduce again straight away."

Mr Kambouris said it was likely the team would choose the Grampians as a reintroduction site because brush-tailed rock wallabies naturally occurred in the national park.

He said the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Adelaide Zoo were also involved in the project.