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Published on *Inside Resources* (<https://www.insideresources.co.nz>)

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Cameron Massey - Wed, 24 Jan 2018

The Department of Conservation has been granted resource consent to extract rock and gravel from a West Coast river on conservation land.

DoC will extract up to 5,000 tonnes of large rocks, and 500 cubic metres of bulk fill gravel, from the Waiho River near Franz Josef Glacier to help protect its walking track.

Inside Resources asked Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage whether the planned extraction falls under the Government's proposed policy of no new mines on conservation land.

At the time of publication, the Minister had not responded, nor to a question of what level of extraction is considered to be mining or quarrying.

Upon forming a government, Labour announced that it plans to ban new mining on conservation land. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told Radio NZ in December the Government would consider other new permits on a case-by-case basis.

Sage told *Inside Resources* last year the Government is considering options for implementing the new policy, including how to approach different types of mining and quarrying activities.

Application approved

In its application granted by the West Coast Regional Council, DoC says it is planning to build a rock wall to protect its walking track in Franz Josef Glacier Valley, using rocks from the glacier valley riverbed.

The resource consent application was lodged with the council on 12 January.

DoC says the work will be in an area of less than 12 degrees slope, constructed with drainage controls to prevent erosion. It says the exact extraction site will depend on where the best rock is found, but likely to occur in the area around Rope Creek.

"There are no surface water takes and work will be monitored to ensure that no subsidence or erosion occurs."

A contractor will be enlisted to carry out the work using excavators, a loader and a truck for carting the rock.

DoC chose the site because it is closest to the proposed rock wall for the walking track, and to control costs.

"The next nearest spot with an adequate supply of suitable rock would be the quarry near Whataroa. This would increase the price by a minimum of four times."

A track suitable for machinery access will be built to the riverbed, including a crossing through a stream that flows intermittently. The Waiho River will be diverted, DoC says, so no major crossings there will be necessary.

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