

Joint Press Release

West Coast Regional Council and Predator Free 2050 Limited

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Predator Free Lake Brunner gets go ahead

Lake Brunner/ Kotuku Whakaoho is the setting for the latest predator free project to receive backing from Predator Free 2050 Limited and the Provincial Growth Fund.

The announcement was made today by Minister of Conservation Eugenie Sage.

The ambitious project will be delivered by West Coast Regional Council, which approved the funding agreement during the confidential section of the last meeting of the council on 14 May.

Chair Allan Birchfield says it is part of a broader vision for the region.

“This project will provide for a field-based classroom, an anchor project for a planned Conservation Centre of Excellence. Given the impacts of Covid-19 on our economy, this is a project that will deliver new nature-based employment for our community.”

The project will receive \$4.4m from Predator Free 2050 Limited to complement significant in-kind contributions from the West Coast Regional Council, farmers and community groups as part of a total project budget of \$15.7m.

The five-year project aims to completely remove possums from 3,700 ha Mt Te Kinga as part of a coordinated predator control programme across the wider Lake Brunner basin, benefitting biodiversity and boosting regional development and tourism.

Predator Free 2050 Limited Chief Executive Ed Chignell says the project was chosen from 18 expressions of interest in funding from provincial areas last year, enabled through a \$19.5m commitment from the Provincial Growth Fund.

“We were impressed by the ambition, the spread of partners and technical innovation of the Lake Brunner project and expect it to be an important proving ground for our national predator free effort.”

Chair of Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Waewae Francois Tumahai welcomed the project and says it will enable the West Coast iwi to be involved in protection of native taonga like roroa, or great spotted kiwi, recently confirmed on Mt Te Kinga.

“We refer to Rerenga ki taonga o nga manu ki Kotuku Moana, the Refuge of Treasured Birds belonging to Lake Brunner, because it is an area that known for a richness of wildlife.”

The total project area will cover 38,541ha of the Lake Brunner basin and includes wetlands, podocarp forest, braided river beds and tussock.

Federated Farmers Chair Katie Milne lives in the area and says predator control on surrounding farmland will provide an important buffer to the sanctuary.

“This project builds on the efforts of OSPRI and DOC in predator suppressions and creates the opportunity for an area where new tools and techniques can achieve permanent predator freedom.”

The Lake Brunner Community Catchment Care Group has been pivotal in the development of the project. Chair of the Group, Rosalie Shaffrey said that protecting and restoring Te Kinga has been a long-held vision for the local community.

“The new initiative builds on previous water quality and pest control work in our catchment and we’re delighted to have attracted such a big boost for this area.”

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Notes to editors

Predator Free Lake Brunner is the seventh large landscape project to be co-funded by the government through Predator Free 2050 Limited.

For more information about Predator Free 2050 Limited, and currently funded projects see www.pf2050.co.nz.

Pioneering naturalist W.W. Smith said in 1888, “no more interesting or profitable district could be visited by the botanist or ornithologist in New Zealand than around the shores of Lake Brunner.” He recounted “considerable numbers” of kiwi, “flocks” of mohua/yellowheads and saddlebacks and an “abundance” of parakeets. But he also recognised the increasingly rare sightings of the “remarkable” kākāpō, the “jubilant” New Zealand thrush (piopio) and the “beautiful” yellow wattled crow (South Island kōkako) and worried what the arrival of the railway and further settlement would bring.

The area retains many threatened or endangered species including kea, kākā, whio, fernbird, bittern, black billed gulls, kākārīki, rifleman, brown creeper and roroa/ great spotted kiwi, which will benefit from predator freedom.

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