

Ground matting for Heaphy Track

By EMMA MONK

One of New Zealand's most popular walks, the 82km long Heaphy Track north of Karamea, now features plastic ground matting to help cope with increased use.

Problems with storm and flood damage, as well as heavy bike and foot traffic, prompted the Department of Conservation to try the 'Jak Mat', a ground stabilisation mat made from 100% recycled plastic.

The mat is held in place by steel pins, aggregate is then placed over the top and compacted.

DOC Buller programme manager for visitor assets Jonathon Thomas said they hoped the new matting, together with greater drainage, would keep track materials in place through

floods and heavy rain.

"We thought we would try it to see if it would add some resilience to the traditional track building materials we use."

The upgrade took place between the Heaphy and Lewis huts.

A muddy hill near Mackay Hut will be the next part of the track to be upgraded, expected to be under way in March.

"The Heaphy Track is a constant upgrade. Once we've finished one body of work we move on to the next one," Mr Thomas said.

The track in the Kahurangi National Park plays host to more than 8000 walkers and bikers a year, travelling between Karamea on the West Coast and Collingwood in Nelson.