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Tracking braided rivers through time

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How wide is a river? This may seem obvious, but for dynamic, multi-channel “braided” rivers it is complicated and contentious, involving concerns such as flood vulnerability and land use regulation. Braided rivers occur naturally but constriction by human encroachment and river management has limited or even eliminated them in landscapes in which they were once common. Constricting braided rivers between artificial flood embankments, or encroaching on the channels, restricts their natural dynamics and may increase flood risk. An international trend towards restoring these rivers has raised significant questions - how much constriction causes loss of braiding and how much room does a braided river need to return to natural form and function? My research will explore these questions by tracking historic changes of several braided rivers in New Zealand that have undergone constriction to discover their natural width and help to develop ideas for sustaining these remarkable riverscapes.