

The central Platte River is a dynamic, braided, sand-bed river located near Grand Island, Nebraska. An understanding of the Platte River channel characteristics, hydrologic flow patterns, and geomorphic conditions is important for the operation and management of water resources by the City of Grand Island. The north channel of the Platte River flows within 1 mile of the municipal well field, and its surface-water flow recharges the underlying aquifer, which serves as a water source for the city. Recharge from the north channel helps minimize the flow of contaminated ground water from the north of the channel towards the well field. In recent years the river channels have experienced no-flow conditions for extended periods during the summer and fall seasons, and it has been observed that no-flow conditions in the north channel often persist after streamflow has returned to the other three channels. This potentially allows more contaminated ground water to move toward the municipal well field each year, and has caused resource managers to ask whether human disturbances or natural geomorphic change have contributed to the increased frequency of no-flow conditions in the north channel. Analyses of aerial photography, channel surveys, Light Detection and Ranging data, discharge measurements, and historical land surveys were used to understand the past and present dynamics of the four channels of the Platte River near Grand Island and to detect changes with time. Results indicate that some minor changes have occurred in the channels. Changes in bed elevation, channel location, and width were minimal when compared using historical information. Changes in discharge distribution among channels indicate that low- and no-flow conditions in the north channel may be attributed to the small changes in channel characteristics or small elevation differences, along with recent reductions in total streamflow within the Platte River near Grand Island, or to factors not measured in this study, such as increased channel roughness from increased vegetation within the channel.

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