Barriers to Usage at Swan Creek Park
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Swan Creek is an urban park located in east Tacoma. It encompasses 373 acres, including a wooded canyon and an upland forest. There are also a series of paved roads that once served a temporary housing unit during the 1940s. Since the 60's Swan Creek has undergone many changes and uses. A recent bond measure has allocated money for improvements. Swan Creek is transitioning from a random series of trails to an established park. It has been observed that Swan Creek is under-utilized. I am interested in understanding the barriers to usage in this park, and urban parks in general, in order to suggest improvements that will draw the desired users.

Methods
In order to understand who uses the park and how, I surveyed 56 users at each of the 4 entrances. I asked people how they use the park, how far they drove, their age range, and what suggestions they had for improving the park. I also surveyed nearby neighborhoods and got 35 responses from non-users. I asked them why they don't use the park and what changes they would like to see before using it. In addition I interviewed a Tacoma Metro Parks employee in order to understand what challenges have been faced in transforming Swan Creek. Finally, I conducted a literature review to help inform my suggestions for improving usage at Swan Creek.

Main Challenges of Making Swan Creek a Successful Park
* Transforming a linear space into a viable park
* Allocating limited funds
* Creating a positive image for the park
* Getting people to know the park even exists
* Getting the right kind of users to use the park
* Balancing natural vs. planned areas

Results
I discovered that how people use the park depends on where they enter. There is one parking lot with no facilities, all other access being along roads. The linear shape of the park presents a challenge of unifying the different areas, which is why I think instead of focusing on one main entrance, each end should have an access point. Some of the main concerns that people had involved safety, parking, and facilities. If both ends had a parking lot with rest rooms it would accommodate more users, and create separate parks that are joined. Also, by providing these services, more of the right kind of user would be attracted, which can scare away undesirable users and help improve the park's image. Many people don't view Swan Creek as a park yet, but they seem to notice that it is improving.

Conclusions
Urban green spaces are important places for people and wildlife. People who use parks are more likely to engage in physical activities, and are more likely to exercise for longer periods of time. In order for the park to become an important part of the community, people have to actually use it. If there are too many barriers to usage, real or perceived, Swan Creek will fail to attract the right kind of user. This may make further funding harder to obtain. I believe that by adding a few amenities, in addition to regular maintenance, Swan Creek will prove to be a value to the community. Positive examples are helpful in justifying urban parks in the face of development pressure.