

Youth Perspectives on Community Assets and Geography in Puyallup, WA.

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Introduction

Youth possess a perspective of their communities that is unique, but not always acknowledged. The goal of this project was to examine how teenage residents in suburban Puyallup, WA perceive their surroundings.

Some theoretical assumptions exist in background literature on this issue. Firstly, planners often design communities to prevent youth from engaging in deconstructive activities, not to allow them to engage in constructive activities. As a result, communities are often designed with fewer youth-oriented assets and venues. Fewer youth-oriented places to travel to will cause teens to be less physically active. In addition, youth perceptions of access to these places will determine whether or not they utilize them.

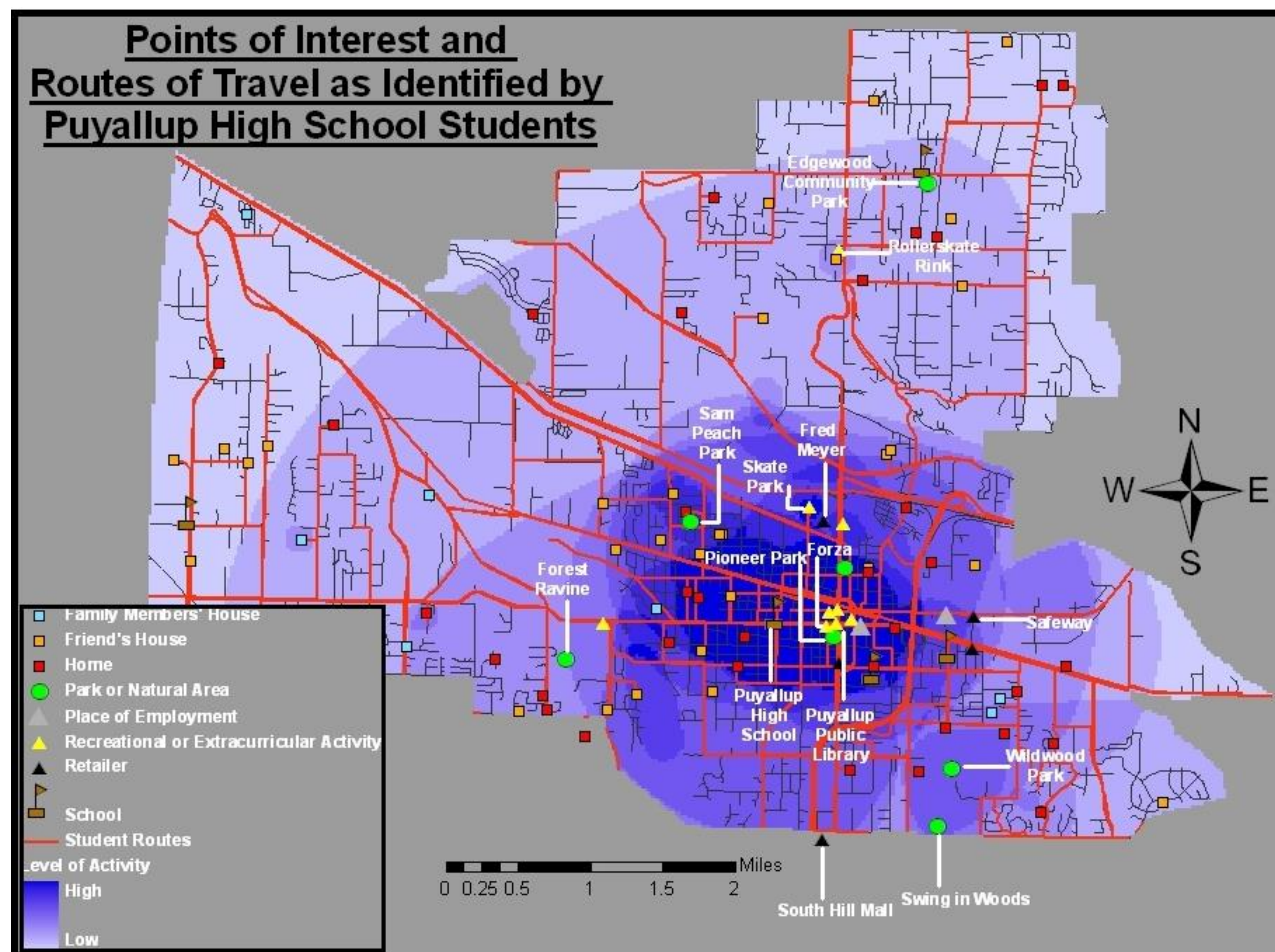
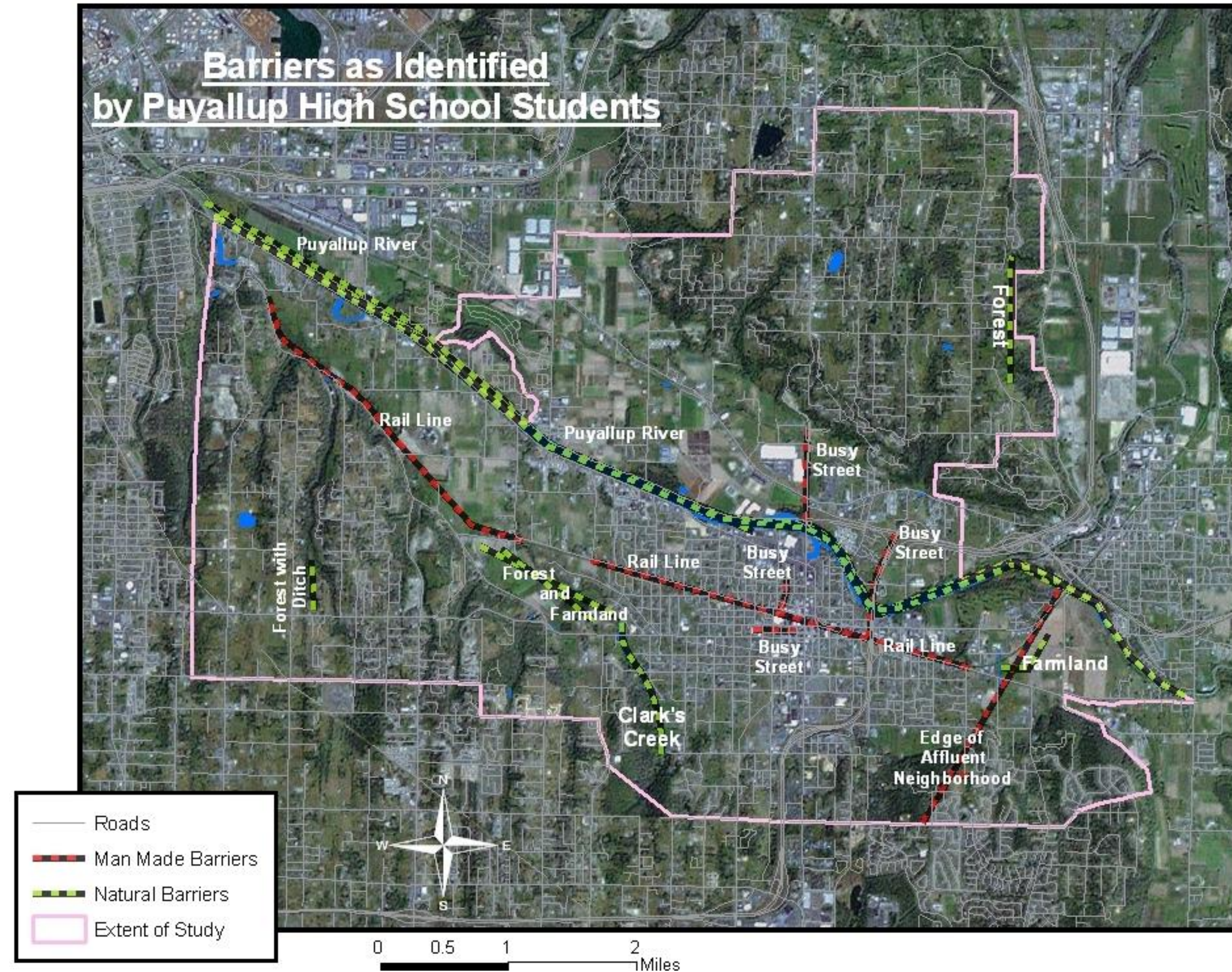
Also according to background literature, youth place special value on public spaces (mainly parks) and the presence of natural elements in a community.

Methods

The spatial extent for this project is the school district “service area” around Puyallup High School (PHS). This area runs six miles east-to-west and north-to-south. It is unique in that it also includes the downtown core of Puyallup.

To perform the study, a survey was developed to be distributed to PHS students (aged 15-18). The students were to draw mental maps of the area around PHS, including points of interest, routes of travel, physical barriers, and main areas of activity.

A total of 55 students participated in the survey. The mental maps they produced were, using ArcView, geocoded over a basemap. The features they drew were then digitized into a GIS as lines (routes and barriers), points (points of interest), and polygons (main areas of activity). The lines and points were merged into a single shapefile for easier analysis. The polygons were rasterized, then extracted using the raster calculator in ArcView.



Findings

The students identified a total of 102 points of interest. A total of 16 of these were places for recreation. The most popular recreational site identified was the Puyallup Public Library, which only 18% of the students acknowledged as an important location. A mere 16% of students identified the popular Forza coffee shop, and about 11% identified the local skate park. This suggests that this part of Puyallup lacks a variety of youth-oriented destinations. Other data indicates that local youth are likely to travel by car to outside areas for recreation, or simply “hang out” at their or a friend’s home. All these alternatives hinder the amount of physical activity local teens could undertake.

As for the barriers identified by the survey subjects, the most prominent one was the Puyallup River. Fewer points of interest were identified on the north side of the river, opposite from PHS and the downtown. Although there are a number of road bridges that cross the river, it seems that it acts as a perceived barrier that hampers teens’ access to other parts of Puyallup.

Of the 28 parks that are located in the study area, only six were identified by students as points of interest. This casts some doubt on the assumption that youth are the most frequent users of parks.

Natural areas (outside parks) were identified both as points of interest and barriers to access by students. This makes the theory that youth place special value on natural elements seem inconclusive.

Acknowledgements

Data files provided by WAGDA and Puyallup School District.

Key Literature

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