Grays Harbor County Profile

By Jim Vleming, Regional labor economist
Updated April 2019

Overview | Geographic facts | Outlook | Labor force and unemployment | Industry employment | Wages and income | Population | Useful links

Overview

Regional context

Grays Harbor County, established in 1854, is bounded to its west by the Pacific Ocean. The Quinault Tribe and several other tribes lived along the coastal area. They were decimated by disease from European contact. The 1850s brought many settlers. The major industries were logging, milling and timber exports.

Local economy

The 1920s brought a long slow decline in the wood products industry including a housing market crash during the Great Depression. Weyerhaeuser planted its first tree farm in 1941 in anticipation of the need to replace old-growth harvests. But local mills suffered further declines from the 1960s on, with Asian mills outbidding them for logs. This was followed by federal logging restrictions due to threats to the spotted owl and salmon. Fishing and clamming, once important to the county’s economy, also deteriorated based on depleted stocks.

In 2000, employment opportunities came in the form of the Stafford Creek prison, which employs close to 600 staff, and the Quinault Tribe casino and resort complex which opened at Ocean Shores. Charter fishing and ocean beaches continue to bring in tourists. Currently, the majority of firms and employment are in services sector industries.

Geographic facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grays Harbor County</th>
<th>Rank in state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land area, 2010 (square miles)</td>
<td>1,902.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People per square mile, 2010</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts
**Outlook**

The outlook for 2019 continues to be guarded as the county struggles to get back to pre-recession employment levels. The unemployment rates continue to fall but nonfarm job growth has been mixed and hard to sustain. Look for this trend to continue into the new year.

The Port of Grays Harbor continues to expand its lines of business including increased log exports, a new compressed natural gas (CNG) facility, and a proposed crude oil facility. Tourism facilities are still beginning to be developed and tourism has been identified as a major player with efforts being made for impactful tourism efforts. Important tourism destinations include Westport, Ocean Shores and Seabrook.

**Labor force and unemployment**

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the Labor area summaries page on ESD’s labor market information website.

The average annual unemployment rate in Grays Harbor County has been on a decline year over year since 2010, when it reached 13.9 percent. In 2018, the figure was 6.7 percent. The annual average in 2017 was 7.1 percent. The winter’s seasonal influence will take these numbers higher in early 2019, but we can expect a better spring in 2019 than during the last several years.

Historical data indicates that the civilian labor force continues to slowly grow in the county, as the totals are again above 28,000, after dipping below 27,000 in 2015.

Source: Employment Security Department

**Industry employment**

Current industry employment statistics are available on the Labor area summaries page on ESD’s labor market information website.

Nonfarm employment declined year over year from 2007 through 2013. It started to turn around in 2014, which showed a 0.6 percent growth rate (120 jobs) compared to 2013. The 2018 nonfarm employment averaged 23,030 jobs, a 310 job (1.4 percent) improvement over 2017. Service-providing industries accounted for the majority of jobs (83.3 percent), with state and local government being the top employer (6,560 jobs). Trade, transportation and utilities account for the next highest employment sector with education and health services in third position.

Nonfarm job growth in the county has been modest, and the last three years have seen nonfarm jobs vary in a 22,220 to 23,030 range. Most sectors of the local service economy remain close to their pre-recession levels, but the goods-producing sector has seen substantial drops in all areas.

For historical industry employment data, contact an economist.

Source: Employment Security Department
**Industry employment by age and gender**

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database, a joint project of state employment departments and the U.S. Census Bureau, matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and gender. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included; federal workers and non-covered workers, such as the self-employed, are not. Data are presented by place of work, not place of residence.

**Grays Harbor County highlights:**

In 2017, the largest job holder age group in Grays Harbor County was the 55 and older age category, making up 26.6 percent of employment across all industries. The next largest share was among people age 45 to 54 with 21.1 percent of employment.

- In 2017, the county’s workers mirrored state patterns with workers age 14 to 24 dominating services jobs in the county including food service, arts, entertainment and recreation and retail trade.

- Workers in the 55 year and older age category were prevalent in public administration, educational services, transportation and warehousing, and management of companies.

Females made up 49.8 percent of the labor force in Grays Harbor County with males making up 50.2 percent in 2017.

- Male-dominated industries included construction (84.0 percent), manufacturing (79.7 percent), wholesale trade (76.0 percent) and transportation and warehousing (78.7 percent).

- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (80.2 percent), healthcare and social assistance (79.4 percent) and educational services (71.1 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

**Wages and income**

In 2017, there were 22,792 jobs in Grays Harbor County covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll of over $907.9 million.

The average annual wage in 2016 was $39,834, well below the state’s average annual wage of $62,077. The median hourly wage in 2017 was $19.81, below the state’s median hourly wage of $24.89.

**Personal income**

Personal income includes earned income, investment income and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

In 2017, the county’s per capita personal income was $38,406, less than the state ($57,896) and the nation ($51,640).
According to the U.S. Census, median household income in 2013 to 2017 was $45,483 in Grays Harbor County.

In 2017, Grays Harbor County’s poverty rate of 18.3 percent was above Washington state’s rate of 11.0 percent and the nation’s rate of 12.3 percent, according to U.S Census Bureau QuickFacts. The state and national rates are not directly comparable to the county rate because they each use different data sources.

Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

**Population**

Grays Harbor County’s population was forecast to be 73,901 in 2018, up slightly from the 2010 Census count of 72,797.

In 2017 the largest city in Grays Harbor County was Aberdeen (16,740), followed by Hoquiam (8,560) and Ocean Shores (6,055). The fourth largest city in the county is Montesano with a population of 4,120.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Population facts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grays Harbor County</th>
<th>Washington state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2018</td>
<td>73,901</td>
<td>7,535,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 2010</td>
<td>72,797</td>
<td>6,724,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent change, 2010 to 2018</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age, gender and ethnicity**

- The persons under 18 years of age made up 20.5 percent of the 2018 population.
- The group 65 years and over made up 20.9 percent of the population.
- The youngest age group, those under 5 years, made up 5.5 percent of the population in 2018.
- Females made up 48.7 percent of the county’s population compared to the state at 50.0 percent in 2018.
- Grays Harbor County is less diverse than the state or nation, according to the 2018 data, as nearly 87.4 percent of the population is counted as white.
- The largest minority grouping in the county was the Hispanic or Latino group at 10.0 percent, followed by the American Indian and Alaska Native category at 5.5 percent of the population in 2018.
Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population by age, 2018</th>
<th>Grays Harbor County</th>
<th>Washington state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years old</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18 years old</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and older</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females, 2018</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity, 2018</th>
<th>Grays Harbor County</th>
<th>Washington state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan Native</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino, any race</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational attainment

In Grays Harbor County, 88.7 percent of persons age 25 or older were high school graduates, compared to 90.8 percent statewide during the period 2013-2017. The number holding a Bachelor's degree or higher was 15.2 percent in the county compared to the state's 34.5 percent and the nation's 30.9 percent.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- County data tables
- Grays Harbor County on ofm.wa.gov
- Grays Harbor County on ChooseWashington.com
- Grays Harbor County History
- Grays Harbor County home page
- U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts
- Grays Harbor Chamber of Commerce
- Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State
- Ocean Shores
- Seabrook
- The Port of Grays Harbor
- Westport Grayland Chamber of Commerce

Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711.