

Jefferson County Profile



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Overview

Regional context

Jefferson County is located on the Olympic Peninsula in northwestern Washington state. Jefferson County is nestled between the Admiralty Inlet and Clallam, Mason, Grays Harbor and Kitsap counties. It faces the Pacific Ocean to the west and Hood Canal to the east. Named for President Thomas Jefferson, it was created in 1852 from a portion of Lewis County. The county seat is Port Townsend.

Much of the county is publicly owned land. About 60 percent of the county comprises the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest and roughly 20 percent is under the jurisdiction of federal and state agencies. The Hoh Reservation and a small corner of the Quinault Reservation are also located in Jefferson County.

Jefferson County is a mid-sized county, ranking 18th in the state in land area. Its population density, as measured by people per square mile, ranks 29th among the other counties.

Local economy

Jefferson County's current economic base grew from a rich history of natural resources extraction including logging and fishing in the late 1880s. By the turn of the 20th century, sawmills, fish processing and shipbuilding were firmly established in the coastal areas of the county. The county also was known for smuggling spirits from Canada in and out of the county's many hidden coves and forests during prohibition.

Port Townsend, the economic center of the county, has experienced periods of boom and bust over the century due to its dependency on these volatile industries. During 2011, Port Townsend finally started to recover from the Great Recession with visible signs of economic growth including new shops, new investments and rebounds in tourism. Annual taxable sales in the county have grown strongly since 2013. In 2018, the Port of Port Townsend had the highest revenue in five years for its major operating units.

The economy of Jefferson County is comprised of both an industrial and an agricultural base. Industrially, the county's history, climate and terrain supports healthy forest products and maritime sectors, including lumber, fish processing, ship repair and maintenance as well as ship and boatbuilding. The agricultural base encompasses tree farms for logging, aquaculture and a flourishing organic farming sector. Food production, stemming from this growing agricultural segment, includes artisan cheeses and breads. Tourism also provides revenue streams to the county. Economic activity is supported by a vibrant port and airport, ferry terminal and state highways.

A recent development is the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone (ECOZ), which consists of a diverse group of geographical census tracts intended to make the Olympic Coast more attractive to investors. Working together, ECOZ is catalyzing economic development in rural areas by engaging with communities and connecting the best opportunities with private capital.

This Opportunity Zone is a unique collaboration of five Tribal Nations, four cities, two counties (Clallam and Jefferson) and two port authorities that spans 14 federally designated Opportunity Zone census tracts. Together, the partners of the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone are building a deal “engine” of community driven projects that both present good investments but also create good jobs, construct affordable and high-end housing, and support innovative entrepreneurs.

The 14 Opportunity Zone census tracts were designated under the federal 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This federal law gives tax incentives to investors who invest their unrealized capital gains in qualified businesses and real estate located in Opportunity Zones through:

- Temporary deferral of capital gains taxes until 2026
- Tax reduction on capital gains (at 5 and 7 years)
- Elimination of taxes on gains from OZ investments (if held for 10 years)

Geographic facts

	Jefferson County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,803.7	18
People per square mile, 2010	16.6	29

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The outlook for Jefferson County for 2020 is one of many challenges. The nonfarm job totals in 2019 were just 60 jobs ahead of the 2018 total. The unemployment rate has also begun to creep up. The year 2020 promises to be a mixed bag of results for the county.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force (CLF) and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD’s labor market information website.

The 2019 CLF was 12,491, up from the 2018 level of 12,156.

This increase follows a reversal of years past where the labor force was shrinking. The labor force has been expanding since 2013. Displaying confidence in the local economy has supported increased labor force numbers.

The 2019 figures show an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent compared to 5.8 percent in 2018. The unemployment rate edged higher in 2019 and the expectation is this trend will continue into 2020.

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.

In Jefferson County, the nonfarm sector averaged 8,970 jobs in 2019. That is 60 jobs more in 2018, and 320 above the 2017 county total.

- The goods-producing sector was up 30 jobs year over year with construction remaining flat over the year. Manufacturing showed an increase of 30 jobs.
- The service-providing sector gained 30 jobs in 2019. However, most sectors of the service-providing category lost jobs in 2019.

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.

Jefferson County highlights:

The population of Jefferson County is older than that of the state, which is also reflected in the labor force figures. Over 30.3 percent of the workforce was age 55 or older in 2018.

- Those aged 55 and older dominated the utilities, educational services and transportation services jobs, while younger workers (14 to 24) made up the bulk of accommodation and food services positions.

When looking at all industries, men held 48.0 percent of the jobs while women made up 52.0 of all workers in 2018. Despite this imbalance, males in the county tended to be employed in higher wage jobs in what are generally considered traditionally male fields such as manufacturing and construction. There are wide differences in the composition of industry sector by gender in Jefferson County.

- Male-dominated industries included construction (79.3 percent), manufacturing (69.8 percent), agriculture, and forestry and fishing and hunting (70.7 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (77.1 percent), healthcare and social assistance (79.3 percent) and educational services (70.7 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2018, Jefferson County had 8,872 jobs covered by the unemployment insurance system, with a payroll of \$350.7 million.

The 2018 average annual wage for Jefferson County was \$39,532, well below the state's average annual wage of \$66,156.

The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$21.77, less than that of the state’s median hourly wage at \$25.98 and for the state less King County at \$22.37.

Median household income, according to the 2014 to 2018 U.S. Census, was \$54,471, well below that of the state’s \$70,116. The U.S. figure was \$60,293.

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.

Per capita personal income in Jefferson County in 2018 was \$52,580 compared to \$62,026 for the state and \$54,446 for the nation. Jefferson County ranked 9th in the state in 2018 in per capita income. It ranked sixth in 2014.

The median household income in Jefferson County was \$54,471 in 2018. This figure was above the median household income of the state (\$74,073) and the nation (\$61,937).

According to the U.S. Census, 12.7 percent of those in the county were living below the poverty level compared to 10.3 percent of the state population and 13.1 percent of the U.S. population in the period 2014 through 2018. 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

The population of Jefferson County was 31,729 in 2018. It grew from 29,872 in 2010.

Jefferson County’s largest city, Port Townsend, had a population of 9,704 in 2018, up from 9,113 in 2010, an increase of 591 people.

Population facts

	Jefferson County	Washington state
Population 2018	31,729	7,535,591
Population 2010	29,872	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	6.2%	12.1%

Age, gender and ethnicity

Jefferson County’s population was older than the population of the state in 2019.

- The county’s residents in the 65 and older category made up 36.9 percent of its population compared to 15.4 percent of the state’s population.
- There were proportionately fewer young residents in Jefferson County compared to the state.

Females made up 51.1 percent of the county’s population compared to 50.0 percent in the state in 2018.

The population is less diverse than the state’s, except for American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

Demographics

	Jefferson County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	3.0%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	11.8%	22.1%
65 years and older	36.9%	15.4%
Females, 2018	51.1%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White	91.4%	78.9%
Black	1.0%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2.3%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	2.1%	10.1%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	3.7%	12.9%

Educational attainment

Most of Jefferson County residents age 25 and older (94.5 percent) were high school graduates, which compares favorably with 90.8 percent of Washington state's residents and 87.3 percent of U.S. residents in the period 2013 to 2017.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 39.9 percent of Jefferson County residents age 25 and older compared to 34.5 percent of state residents and 30.9 percent of U.S. residents over the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Jefferson County Economic Development Council](#)
- [Visit Jefferson County](#)
- [Jefferson County History](#)
- [Jefferson County home page](#)
- [Jefferson County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Jefferson County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Olympic Consortium WorkSource](#)
- [Port of Port Townsend](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)
- [Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone](#)
- [City of Port Townsend](#)

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.