

# Lewis County Profile

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## Overview

### *Regional context*

Lewis County, located in southwestern Washington, is the sixth largest county in the state. The Chehalis and Cowlitz rivers are the two major rivers in the county. Lewis, named for Meriwether Lewis, was created as a county in 1845. Its original borders encompassed half of Washington state and British Columbia. The Chehalis and Meshall tribal people inhabited this area prior to white explorers and settlers, but their numbers were decimated by disease. Many of these settlers worked in the trading posts as well as the Hudson Bay commercial farm that provided the trading posts.

### *Local economy*

Once the railroad was established, logging and milling attracted immigrants and in-migrants. Labor organizers were outraged by the unsafe working conditions and low wages in this industry. In 1919, a gun battle erupted between members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and some World War I veterans and is known as the “Centralia Massacre”.

The 1920s brought hard times to Lewis before the Great Depression took hold. World War II increased the demand for wood and farm products, lifting the Lewis County economy again. Its economy has continued boom and bust cycles over its history.

## Geographic facts

	Lewis County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,402.8	6
People per square mile, 2010	31.4	22

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Outlook

The recession was difficult on the Lewis county economy, as nonfarm payrolls dropped and double-digit unemployment rates were the rule rather than the exception. Now, over 10 years removed from the downturn, the county economy seems to have hit a holding pattern. Nonfarm job growth has slowed, and the unemployment rate has begun to rise. Heading into 2020, the outlook is guarded. Plenty of optimism remains as several developments are in the works.

## **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.

Average annual unemployment in Lewis County has been declining since the 13.3 percent rate posted in 2009. The 2019 streak ended, as unemployment rose from 6.3 percent in 2018 to 6.5 percent in 2019. In 2017 the rate was 6.6 percent.

Since 2014, the labor force in the county has steadily grown, up nearly 4,000 above 2014 totals. This gain in the labor force may indicate a continued faith in the local economy as well as a more positive job market.

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 Lewis County, nonfarm job numbers are slowing across the board. Specifically, there were on average 26,260 nonfarm jobs in the county in 2019, compared to 23,620 in 2010.

But over the year, the numbers have seemed to hit a wall, as compared to 2018, nonfarm payrolls are up just 40 jobs. The goods-producing sector employed 5,260 in 2019, down 20 from 2018.

Manufacturing was down 40 and construction was up 90 from their 2018 totals. The service-providing sector gained 60 jobs from 2018 to 2019. Government employment was down by 70 jobs.

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.

### *Lewis County highlights:*

In 2018, the largest job holder age group in Lewis County was the 55 and older age category, making up 25.9 percent of employment across all industries. The next largest share was among people age 35 to 44 with 21.0 percent of employment.

- In 2018, the county's workers mirrored state patterns with workers age 14 to 24 dominating the accommodation and food services jobs in the county with over 32.0 percent of the positions. This age group was also well represented in arts, entertainment and recreation and retail trade.
- Workers in the 55 year and older age category were prevalent in mining, educational services, transportation and warehousing, real estate and rental and leasing, public administration and utilities.

Females made up 48.3 percent of the labor force in Lewis County with males making up the difference at 51.7 percent in 2018. Men were more often represented in higher paying industries.

- Male-dominated industries included mining (88.4 percent), construction (83.1 percent), manufacturing (82.1 percent) and utilities (83.0 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (77.4 percent), healthcare and social assistance (81.5 percent) and educational services (70.9 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

## **Wages and income**

In 2018, there were 26,404 jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Lewis County, with a total payroll of \$1,139,114,151.

Lewis County's average annual wage in 2018 was \$43,142, below the state's average of \$66,156.

The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$21.46, below the state's median hourly wage of \$25.98 and the state excluding King County median hourly wage of \$22.37.

### *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.

Personal income in 2018 lagged both the state and nation, as Lewis County's per capita personal income was \$43,453. The U.S. average was \$54,446 and the state average was \$62,026. Lewis County ranked 24th in the state in per capita personal income in 2018.

The median household income in Lewis County was \$61,058 in 2018. The county's median was less than the state's (\$74,073) and the nation's (\$61,937).

Over the period 2014 to 2018, 12.5 percent of the Lewis County's population was living below the poverty level, compared to 10.3 percent in the state and 13.1 percent in the nation. 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 Lewis County population has grown 5.5 percent since 2010. The largest city is Centralia, with a 2018 population of 17,495.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### *Population facts*

	<b>Lewis County</b>	<b>Washington state</b>
Population 2018	79,604	7,535,591
Population 2010	75,457	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	5.5%	12.1%

## *Age, gender and ethnicity*

When compared with the state, the Lewis County population is somewhat older, although it has a similar gender ratio. Far more residents identify themselves as white when compared to the state and most other groups represent a lower proportion of the county population compared to the state as well.

## *Demographics*

	Lewis County	Washington state
<b>Population by age, 2018</b>		
Under 5 years old	5.9%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	21.4%	22.1%
65 years and older	21.0%	15.4%
<b>Females, 2018</b>	50.0%	50.0%
<b>Race/ethnicity, 2018</b>		
White	92.0%	78.9%
Black	0.9%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2.0%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.6%	10.1%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	10.3%	12.9%

## *Educational attainment*

Most Lewis County residents age 25 and older (87.8 percent) were high school graduates, which compares with 91.1 percent of Washington state's residents and 87.1 percent of U.S. residents in the period 2014 to 2018.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 16.8 percent of Lewis County residents age 25 and older compared to 35.3 percent of state residents and 31.5 percent of U.S. residents during the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## **Useful links**

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Lewis County home page](#)
- [Lewis County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Lewis County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Lewis Economic Development Council](#)
- [Centralia – Chehalis Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Port of Centralia](#)
- [Port of Chehalis](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Lewis County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Centralia College](#)

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.