

Mason County Profile

By Jim Vleming,
Regional labor economist
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Overview

Regional context

The county now known as Mason was first established as Sawamish County in 1854. Carved out of Thurston County, it extended to the Pacific Ocean. In 1864, it was renamed Mason County. It encompasses the southern part of Hood Canal and many bays and inlets of south Puget Sound. The indigenous peoples include the Coast Salish. European contact in the 1700s brought disease that decimated the native populations. In the 1840s, American settlers arrived and began farming.

Local economy

Forest products became the largest industry in the county, and expanded greatly when the railroads made it possible to feed the various mills in the area. Work on creating a terminus for the transcontinental railroad in Union came to an abrupt halt with the *Panic of 1893*, the most serious economic crisis in the nation's history. Mason County was fortunate, however, in that banker Alfred Anderson partnered with loggers to get them back to work and then with Sol Simpson to create the Simpson Logging Company, which became the largest employer in the state. In the 1980s, the Forest Service eliminated most timber sales to protect the spotted owl.

The prison in Shelton added hundreds of beds during this period, helping to offset job losses in the forest industry. Recreation as well as oyster and seafood production and processing also have increased in importance. Mason County also has become an important community for commuters to Thurston and Pierce counties. In 2017, 53.2 percent of earned income came from residents working outside the county.

Geographic facts

	Mason County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	959.42	29
People per square mile, 2010	63.3	15

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Mason County has reduced its unemployment rate levels to those last seen in 2006. However, the return to pre-recession employment totals in some industries continues to be slow. Manufacturing had over 1,900 jobs as recently as 2006 compared to an average of 880 in 2018. Construction, which employed 1,140 in 2006, averaged 820 in 2018. In fact, total nonfarm employment in 2018, while above 14,000 for the first time since 2008, still lags pre-2008 totals by several hundred jobs.

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.

Compared to the 2010 high of 11.9 percent, the county has had declining unemployment rates. The 2018 rate was 6.3 percent. The 2017 average annual rate was 6.6 percent.

The labor force has been above 23,000 since 2011 on an average annual basis, but remains below the 25,549 total for 2009. The 2018 data showed a slight increase in this metric, averaging 24,274.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

Nonfarm industry employment in Mason County has been consistent over the last several years, with most industries remaining steady. However, nonfarm employment totals continue to trail the pre-recession figure of 14,860 in 2007.

The 2018 annual average of 14,140 jobs is 360 more jobs than in 2017. It is also the first time that the total has broken the 14,000-job barrier since 2008. The largest industries in the Mason County economy during 2018 were government (5,870) and trade, transportation and utilities (2,540). The manufacturing industry in 2018 accounted for 880 jobs, and saw a loss of 60 jobs over the year and a drop of 190 over the last two years. The 2018 industry employment level represents a 2.6 percent gain in total nonfarm employment compared to the 2017 totals. This trend will likely be the norm heading into 2019, although manufacturing will continue to face significant headwinds.

For historical industry employment data, [contact an economist](#).

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

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.

Mason County highlights:

In 2017, the largest job holder age group in Mason County was the 55 and older age category, making up 25.3 percent of employment across all industries. The next largest share was among people aged 45 to 54 with 21.0 percent of employment.

In 2017, the county's workers mirrored state patterns with workers aged 14 to 24 dominating the accommodation and food services jobs in the county with over 29.6 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 educational services, transportation and warehousing, real estate and rental and leasing and other services.

Females made up 51.2 percent of the labor force in Mason County with males making up the difference at 48.8 percent in 2017. Men were more often represented in higher paying industries:

- Male-dominated industries included mining, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and transportation and warehousing.
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance, healthcare and social assistance and educational services.

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2017, there were 14,021 jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Mason County, with a total payroll of over \$563.8 million.

Mason County's average annual wage in 2017 was \$40,213, below the state's average of \$62,077.

The median hourly wage in 2017 was \$20.01, below the state's median hourly wage of \$24.89 and the state excluding King County median hourly wage of \$22.00.

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 2017 lagged both the state and nation, as Mason County's per capita personal income was \$40,500. The U.S. average was \$51,640 and the state rate was \$57,896. Mason County ranked 29th in the state in per capita personal income in 2017.

The median household income in Mason County was \$53,087 in the 2013 to 2017 period according to U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. The county's median was less than the state's (\$66,174) and the nation's (\$57,652).

Over the period 2013 to 2017, 16.2 percent of the Mason County’s population was living below the poverty level, compared with 12.2 percent for the state and the nation at 14.6 percent. 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 Mason County has slightly increased since 2010. The largest city is Shelton, with a 2017 population of 10,146; the balance of residents are living in unincorporated areas.

Population facts

	Mason County	Washington state
Population 2018	63,710	7,405,743
Population 2010	60,696	6,724,545
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	5.0%	10.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Age, gender and ethnicity

Mason County is somewhat older than the statewide average, with fewer individuals under the age of 18 and more 65 and older. The county is less diverse than the state in terms of race and ethnicity, with 88.2 percent white and 1.3 percent black. The American Indian and Alaska Natives make up 4.5 percent of the population.

Demographics

	Mason County	Washington state
Population by age, 2017		
Under 5 years old	5.3%	6.2%
Under 18 years old	19.4%	22.2%
65 years and older	22.6%	15.1%
Females, 2017	48.3%	50%
Race/ethnicity, 2017		
White	87.9%	79.5%
Black	1.4%	4.2%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	4.7%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.8%	9.7%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	9.9%	12.7%

Educational attainment

Most Mason County residents age 25 and older (87.8 percent) were high school graduates, which compares 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 17.8 percent of Mason County residents age 25 and older compared to 34.5 percent of state residents and 30.9 percent of U.S. residents during the same period

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Mason County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Mason County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Mason County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Mason County Economic Development Council](#)
- [Port of Allyn](#)
- [Port of Dewatto](#)
- [Port of Grapeview](#)
- [Port of Hoodspout](#)
- [Port of Shelton](#)
- [Shelton-Mason County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas](#)

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.