

Skamania County Profile

By Scott Bailey
Regional labor economist
Updated May 2019



[Overview](#) | [Geographic facts](#) | [Outlook](#) | [Labor force and unemployment](#) | [Industry employment](#) | [Wages and income](#) | [Population](#) | [Useful links](#)

Overview

Regional context

Skamania County is located about 40 miles east of the Portland metro area, in the beautiful Columbia River Gorge. Almost 90 percent of the county is timberland, mostly within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Much of the non-timber land is concentrated in the southern strip along the Columbia River, and falls under the protection of the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. As a result of these factors, the county has a small population and job base, and projections generally call for modest growth in jobs and population over the next 20 years.

Local economy

Twenty-five years ago, Skamania County's economy went through a wrenching transition. Long dependent upon timber for jobs and income, the county lost both when logging was curtailed on national forests, and the Stevenson Co-Ply, the county's largest employer (owned cooperatively by current and former workers), closed. Ten percent of the county's job base disappeared, and unemployment topped 22 percent in February 1992. But a year after the closure, the Skamania Lodge, a new destination resort subsidized by federal funds from the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area Act, opened, with almost the same number of jobs. Almost overnight, Skamania had shifted from a timber economy to a tourist economy.

Employment changed little in the subsequent years, with a brief uptick late in the 1990s and a corresponding loss heading into the 2001 recession. Job growth picked up in 2002, but the Great Recession wiped out much of the gains.

The transition from timber to tourism was accompanied by a shift in occupational structure, and generally lower wages and income (though official wage data do not include tips). In addition, ex-timber workers who commuted to Clark County for retraining discovered that the commute to the Portland area wasn't all that onerous. While the number of employed residents grew by about 15 percent during the 1990s, the number of those commuting to jobs outside of the county grew by almost 50 percent. In 2017, 72 percent of the county's earned income came from jobs outside of the county, easily the highest in the state. Indeed, almost half of the population growth in the 1990s came in the southwest part of the county closest to Portland.

Geographic facts

	Skamania County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,655.68	24
People per square mile, 2010	6.73	35

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Outside of the planned opening of the residential treatment center mentioned above, Skamania County will likely see slow but steady employment growth over the next few years.

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 county labor force was estimated at 5,335 in 2018, with an unemployment rate of 5.6 percent. That was lowest rate on record (going back to 1980) and well below the peak of 13.1 percent in the 2008 to 2009 recession. A majority of employed county residents work in another county.

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.

Skamania County nonfarm employment grew steadily from 2002 to 2007, dropped sharply in 2008 to 2011, and has vacillated around 2,200 jobs since then. The county added 30 jobs in 2018. Over the 2002 to 2018 period, despite the ups and downs, private sector growth was strong, averaging 1.9 percent per year. Job growth was concentrated in manufacturing (+90), hospitality (+130), construction (+70), and all other services (+80). On the down side, federal employment fell by 120 jobs and local non-educational government declined by 70 jobs.

In 2018, of the 2,230 jobs in the county, 30 percent (660) were public sector, a much higher proportion than for the state and nation. Leisure and hospitality (560) and manufacturing (290) dominated the private sector.

The major trends and events over the last 25 years include:

- Logging restrictions on federal lands curbed harvests in the early 1990s, leading to a loss of timber jobs. Timber harvests fell from around 400 million board feet in the 1980s to as low as 24 million board feet in 2009 before rebounding to 74 million board feet in 2017. Logging employment fell from almost 100 jobs in 1990 to only 10 in 2018.
- Stevenson Co-Ply closed in 1992.

- Skamania Lodge opened in 1993 and expanded in 2003. Tourist-related restaurants, retail and services have developed in the Stevenson area.
- The federal Wind River Nursery closed in the late 1990s.
- Molded Fiberglass, a trucking industry supplier, opened in 1995, had peak employment in 2000, but then closed after its major customer retrenched during the 2001 recession.
- Insitu moved about 100 jobs to Stevenson in August 2009, but these were transferred back to Klickitat County in 2014.
- The Bonneville Hot Springs resort opened in North Bonneville in 2002 and then closed in early 2017. The new owner plans to reopen the facility as an inpatient treatment center, perhaps as early as the summer of 2019.

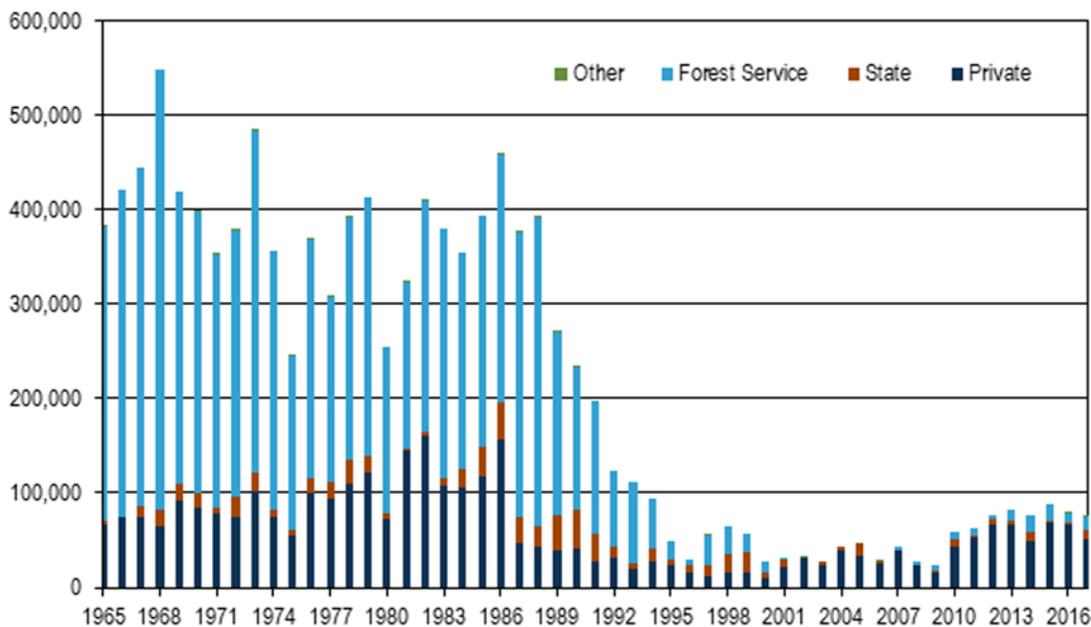
Skamania County’s agricultural production is a fairly small part of the county economy. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, there were 144 farms in the county, covering 6,473 acres. While those numbers are up from the last Census, the county still had fewer acres in farmland than any county in the state.

Most of Skamania County is forestland. From 1965 to 1988, timber harvest averaged 386 million board feet a year. From 1994 to 2017, the average plummeted to 53 million board feet, with most of the decline due to lower harvests on federal lands.

Source: Employment Security Department

Skamania County timber harvest by ownership, 1965 to 2017

(000s of board feet)



Current timber harvest well below historical levels

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

Source: Washington Department of Natural Resources

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.

Skamania County highlights:

- Females held a majority (50.8 percent) of the non-federal jobs in Skamania County in 2017, a reversal from 2016.
- Female-dominated industries included education (76 percent), accommodation and food services (59 percent) and retail trade (63 percent).
- Male dominated industries include manufacturing (80 percent) and construction (76 percent).
- Older workers (aged 55+) made up 26 percent of jobholders in the county, a bit higher than the 22 percent statewide.

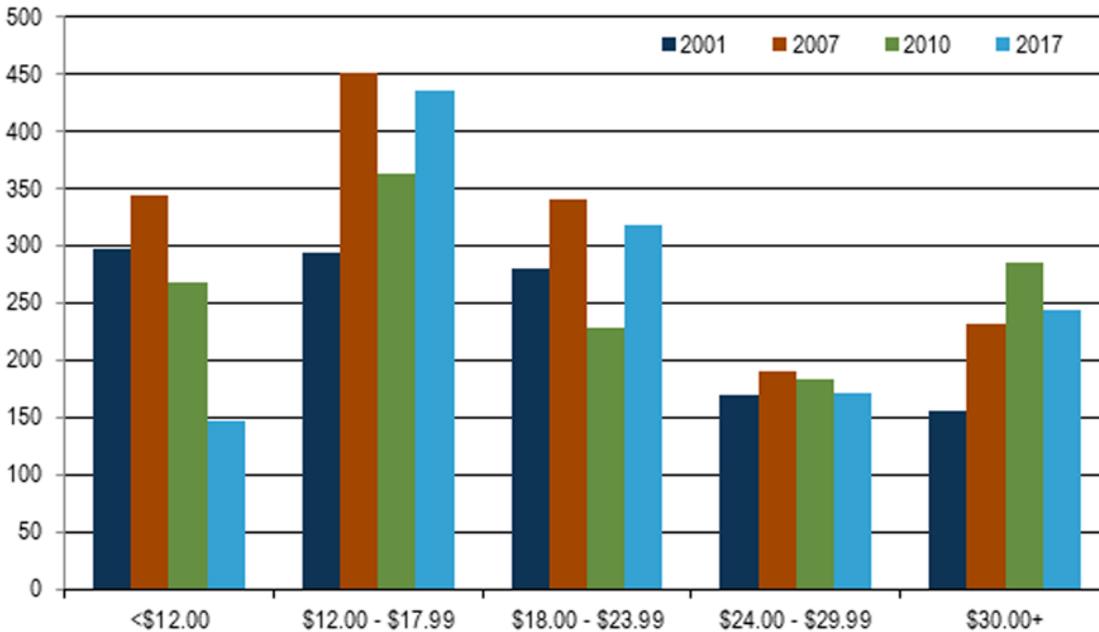
Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Skamania County was \$19.24 in 2017, a solid 2.5 percent increase over 2016 and the highest on record going back to 1990. The county was more than \$2.00 per hour below the state average if King County were excluded.

Skamania has generally seen a positive shift in wages over the years. In 2001, a quarter of jobs located in the county paid below \$12.00 (adjusted for inflation) – that was down to 11 percent in 2017. There were more moderate-wage jobs (\$12.00 per hour to \$23.99 per hour) and more upper-wage jobs (\$30.00 per hour and up) in 2017 as well.

FTE jobs by hourly wage



Median household income in Skamania for the 2013 to 2017 period was \$53,606, not significantly different from the 2008 to 2012 time span. Both the median household income and median family income (\$65,352) were about 8 percent below the national average.

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, county per capita income was \$43,851. That was 24 percent below the state average, and 15 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state and nation has closed by about 5 percentage points since 2000. Most of the difference was in earned income, which on a per capita basis was \$8,000 lower than the nation and \$11,000 below the state. Investment income was also a bit lower in Skamania. Transfer payments were higher primarily due to Social Security payments to Skamania's older than average population.

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

Population

Skamania's population was estimated at 11,890 in 2018. The increase of 200 residents over 2017 came through net in-migration. There were actually more deaths than births in the county in that year. Over the past decade, population has grown by 0.8 percent per year, just above the national rate.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Washington of Financial Management

Population facts

	Skamania County	Washington state
Population 2018	11,890	7,427,570
Population 2000	9,872	5,894,121
Percent change, 2000 to 2018	20.4%	26.0%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Washington Office of Financial Management

Age, gender and ethnicity

Skamania's population is somewhat older than the state and nation. In 2018:

- Those below the age of 20 in Skamania County made up 21 percent versus 25 percent statewide.
- Those aged 20 to 39 made up 20 percent versus 27 percent statewide.
- People aged 40 to 59 was at 28 percent, which is above the state figure of 25 percent.
- The population aged 60 or older made up 31 percent, which beat the state average of 22 percent.

The county is also less diverse: in 2018, 12 percent of the population were people of color, much less than the statewide rate of 32 percent.

Demographics

	Skamania County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	4.4%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	19.3%	22.4%
65 years and older	21.6%	15.8%
Females, 2018	49.4%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	88.3%	68.5%
Black	0.4%	3.7%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.2%	1.3%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.3%	9.2%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	5.7%	13.0%

Educational attainment

According to the 2013 to 2017 American Community Survey, Skamania had close to the national average of residents with post-baccalaureate degrees (9.6 percent vs. 11.8 percent). The county had relatively fewer residents with just a bachelor's (13.7 percent vs. 19.1 percent), and more with some college but no degree (28.8 percent vs. 20.8 percent).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Skamania County information on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Skamania County information on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Skamania County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Skamania County](#)
- [City of Stevenson](#)
- [City of North Bonneville](#)
- [South Central Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [WorkSource Office Directory](#)
- [Skamania County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Skamania County homepage](#)

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.