

Wahkiakum County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

Wahkiakum is a small, heavily-forested, beautiful county located on the Columbia River roughly fifteen miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. Logging is the main industry, and local government is a major source of jobs and wages. The county is an attractive place to retire, and more than a quarter of the county's personal income comes from transfer payments such as Social Security and Medicare.

Local economy

Wahkiakum County has an ideal climate for growing Douglas fir trees on a short rotation. It is relatively isolated in terms of transportation infrastructure, linked by Highway 2 to the Longview area (eastward) and Ilwaco (westward). In addition, the county operates a ferry from Cathlamet to Westport, Oregon. As a result, the county has kept a largely rural feel, with much of its land devoted to forests.

Geographic facts

	Wahkiakum County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	263.4	37
People per square mile, 2010	15.1	30

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Wahkiakum County had the largest percentage drop in employment of any county in the state during the 2008 to 2009 recession. Since hitting bottom, there has been very little change in job counts. That situation doesn't look to change significantly any time soon.

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 1,317 in 2018, with an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent, down from 7.2 percent in 2017. Unemployment peaked most recently at 15.3 percent in 2010, after rising from the cyclical low of 7.2 percent in 2006.

According to the Census Bureau's On The Map program, over three-fourths of the county's employed residents worked outside the county in 2015, mostly in Cowlitz, Clark, Pacific, Multnomah (OR) and Clatsop (OR) counties. Slightly more than half of the people who worked in Wahkiakum lived outside the county, with Cowlitz and Pacific being home to half of those cross-county commuters.

Bureau of Economic Analysis data shows that 61 percent of earned income in the county came from residents holding jobs outside the county, while 23 percent of wages at county employers went to workers who lived outside of the 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.

Wahkiakum County employment grew steadily during most of the 1990s, and then stabilized around 850 jobs from 1998 to 2008. Job growth came in construction, logging, manufacturing, local government and non-retail services.

Employment fell to 700 nonfarm jobs in 2012, and has remained at just over 700 jobs since then. Logging employment, at 80 jobs in 2018, was about half of its mid-2000's level. Construction (60 jobs) and transportation and utilities (70 jobs) were a bit higher, while manufacturing (50 jobs) was slightly lower than before the recession. Most of the job loss was in the "all other services" category, which dropped from 260 jobs in 2008 to 170 jobs in 2018. Part of the decline was due to the closure of the Columbia Care Center nursing home. Government employed 300, mostly in K-12 schools (100) and other local agencies like the county government (180).

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.

Wahkiakum County highlights:

For jobs located in Wahkiakum County in 2017, about 55 percent were held by males, and 45 percent by females – while the state was split closer to 52/48. Three industries in the county are dominated by male workers: agriculture/logging (84 percent male), construction (84 percent) and manufacturing (57 percent). Women were predominant in healthcare and social assistance (80 percent), hospitality (70 percent) and education (64 percent). Wahkiakum’s workforce was much older than the state average, with 33 percent aged 55 and older, versus 22 percent statewide.

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2017, Wahkiakum employers paid out \$25.5 million in wages, a 5 percent increase over 2016. Employment also increased slightly, by just over 1 percent. As a result, the average annual wage for jobs in the county rose by 2.8 percent to \$35,793, the highest on record.

The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Wahkiakum County was \$21.46 in 2017, slightly above the 2016 level. Wahkiakum’s median was more than \$3.00 per hour below the median for the entire state. Wahkiakum matched the state median back in 1998, but wages have grown slowly since then.

Median household income averaged \$49,508 for the 2013 to 2017 period – about 1 percent higher than for the 2008 to 2012 period. Median family income was up 6 percent (to \$58,235) over the same period.

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 \$41,270. That was 29 percent below the state average, and 20 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state and nation had been widening steadily for 30 years before the Great Recession hit. Since then, the gap with the nation has closed by 10 percentage points; the gap with the state closed for several years, but has resumed widening.

Wahkiakum residents are much more dependent upon investment income and transfer payments like Social Security and Medicare than most areas. Thirty percent of county income came from transfer payments in 2017, more than twice that of the state.

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

Population

Wahkiakum’s population was estimated at 4,100 in 2018, with little change over the past decade – only 0.2 percent a year on average, about a quarter of the national rate and a sixth of the state rate.

Population facts

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population 2018	4,100	7,427,570
Population 2010	3,824	5,894,143
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	0.2%	1.6%

Age, gender and ethnicity

Wahkiakum's population is much older than the state and nation. In 2016:

- 18 percent of the county was below the age of 20, versus 25 percent statewide.
- 15 percent was aged 20 to 39, a little more than half the statewide average of 27 percent.
- 23 percent was aged 40 to 59, almost the same as the state's 25 percent.
- 44 percent was aged 60 or older, double the state average of 22 percent.

The county is also less diverse: in 2018, 91 percent of the population was white and non-Latino, compared with 68 percent in Washington and 61 percent in the U.S.

Source: Office of Financial Management

Demographics

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population by age, 2018		
Under 5 years old	3.6%	6.2%
Under 18 years old	15.8%	22.4%
65 years and older	34.7%	15.8%
Race/ethnicity, 2018		
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	90.7%	68.5%
Black, not Hispanic or Latino	0.2%	3.7%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, not Hispanic or Latino	1.1%	1.3%
Asian, not Hispanic or Latino	0.9%	8.5%
Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, not Hispanic or Latino	0.2%	0.7%
Two or more races, not Hispanic or Latino	3.1%	4.3%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	3.8%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Office of Financial Management

Educational attainment

Wahkiakum residents are less likely to have a college degree, and also less likely to have dropped out of high school, than the state and nation. Only 8 percent of adults in the county failed to finish high school (vs. 13 percent nationally), and 17 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher (vs. 31 percent nationally).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Wahkiakum County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Wahkiakum County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Wahkiakum County History](#)
- [Wahkiakum County home page](#)
- [Port of Wahkiakum County No. 2](#)
- [Wahkiakum County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Southwest Washington Economic Development Commission \(SWEDC\)](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)

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