

# Wahkiakum County Profile

By Scott Bailey  
Regional labor economist  
Updated January 2020



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

## 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	37
People per square mile, 2010	15	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 1,373 through the first 11 months of 2019, with an unemployment rate of 6.8 percent. Both measures were up slightly from 2018. 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, just over half (53 percent) of the county's employed residents worked outside the county in the 2012 to 2016 period. One out of six worked in Cowlitz County, while 9 percent worked in Pacific County and 7 percent commuted to Clatsop County, Oregon. About 40 percent of the workers who held jobs in Wahkiakum County, lived outside the county, with 17 percent living in Cowlitz County.

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 in the low 700s since then. Preliminary estimates for 2019 place total nonfarm jobs at 750. Logging employment, at 80 jobs in 2019, was about half of its mid-2000's level. Construction (60 jobs) and manufacturing (70 jobs) were a bit higher than before the recession. Most of the job loss was in the "all other services" category, which dropped from 260 jobs in 2008 to 180 jobs in 2019. Part of the decline was due to the closure of the Columbia Care Center nursing home. Government employed 300, mostly in K-12 schools (90) and other local agencies like the county government (200).

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 2018, about 53 percent were held by males, and 47 percent by females – while the state was split closer to 52/48. Two industries in the county are dominated by male workers: agriculture/logging (84 percent male), construction (88 percent). Women were predominant in healthcare and social assistance

(87 percent), hospitality (72 percent) and education (67 percent). The average wage for female workers was 62 percent of the average for male workers.

Wahkiakum’s workforce was much older than the state average, with 33 percent aged 55 and older, versus 22 percent statewide.

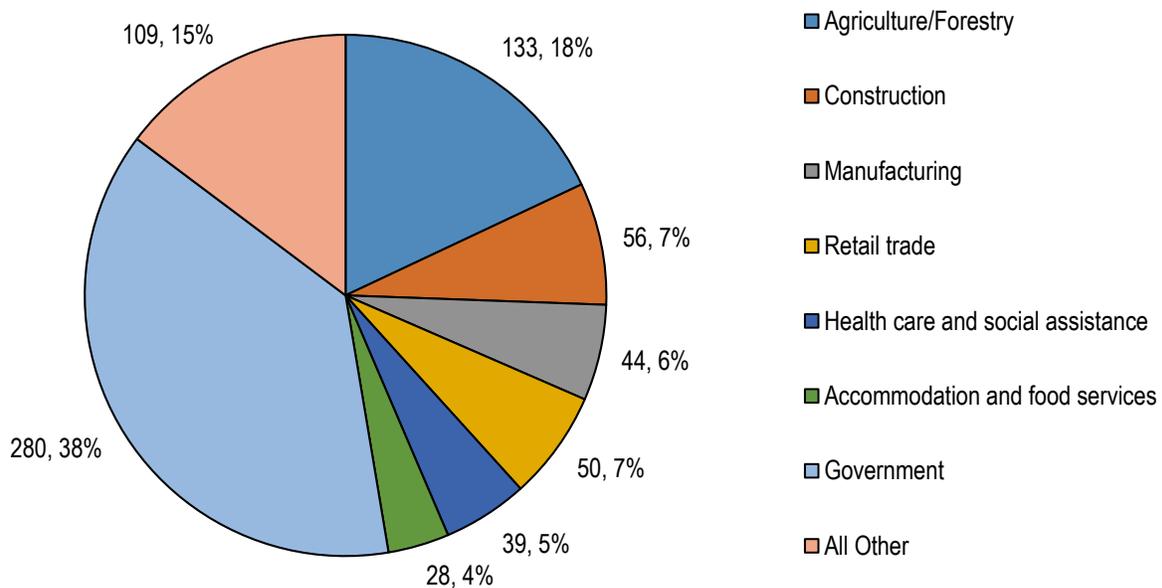
Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

## Wages and income

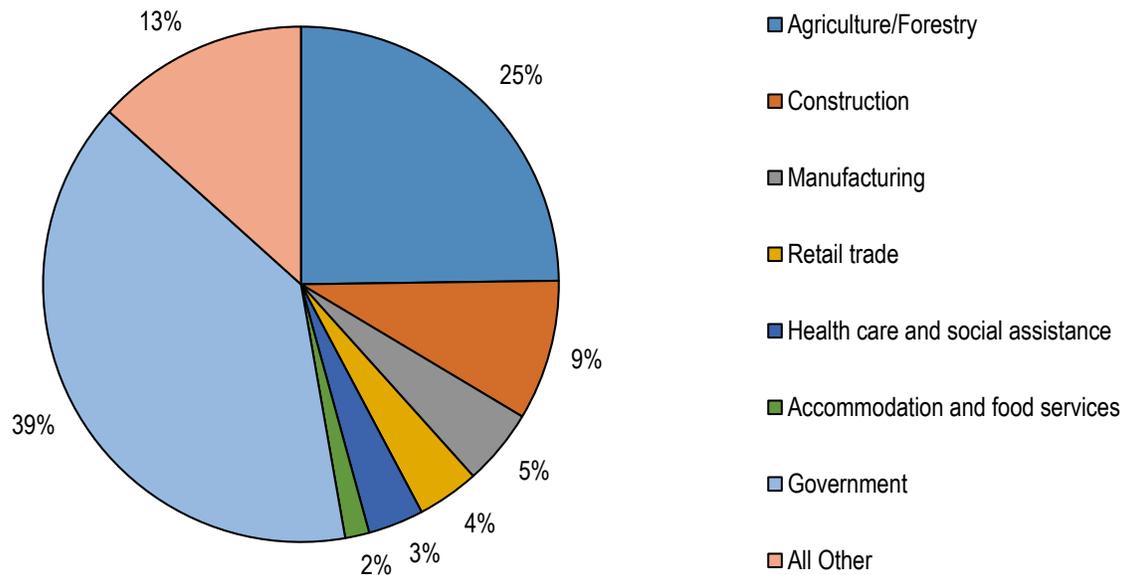
In 2018, Wahkiakum employers paid out \$27.6 million in wages, a 6 percent increase over 2017. Employment also increased slightly, by just over 1 percent. The average annual wage for jobs in the county rose by 2.8 percent to \$37,292, the highest on record.

The charts below contrast industry shares of employment and wages covered by unemployment insurance in the county. The biggest difference: agriculture/forestry (primarily logging) supplied 18 percent of the jobs in the county, and 25 percent of total wages.

### Covered employment in 2018



### Covered wages in 2018



The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Wahkiakum County was \$22.16 in 2018, 1 percent above the 2017 level. Wahkiakum’s median was almost \$4.00 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 \$54,085 for the 2014 to 2018 period – substantially higher than the \$44,619 inflation-adjusted median for the 2009 to 2013 period. Median family income was up 33 percent (to \$68,309) 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 2018, county per capita income was \$42,423. That was 32 percent below the state average and 22 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state and nation narrowed after the Great Recession hit. Since then, the gap with the nation has stabilized and the gap with the state has resumed widening.

Wahkiakum residents are much more dependent upon investment income and transfer payments like Social Security and Medicare than most areas. Thirty-one percent of county income came from transfer payments in 2018, almost twice that of the state’s 17 percent. On a per capita basis, the differences were mostly due to Wahkiakum’s older population: higher Social Security and Medicare payments.

Per Capita Transfer Payments	U.S.	State	Wahkiakum County
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,082</b>	<b>\$8,738</b>	<b>\$12,942</b>
Social Security benefits	\$2,972	\$2,940	\$5,634
Medicare benefits	\$2,234	\$1,807	\$3,549
Public assistance medical care benefits	\$1,865	\$1,712	\$1,718
Income maintenance benefits	\$794	\$809	\$854
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits	\$174	\$137	\$171
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$175	\$163	\$165
Unemployment insurance compensation	\$84	\$137	\$80
Veterans' benefits	\$336	\$412	\$450
All Other	\$449	\$622	\$320

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 4,426 in 2018, with a growth rate less than the state's.

### *Population facts*

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population 2018	4,426	7,535,591
Population 2010	3,979	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2018	11.2%	12.1%

### *Age, gender and ethnicity*

Wahkiakum's population is much older than the state and nation. In 2018:

- 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.

## Demographics

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
<b>Population by age, 2018</b>		
Under 5 years old	3.1%	6.1%
Under 18 years old	17.3%	22.1%
65 years and older	32.2%	15.4%
<b>Females, 2018</b>	<b>49.8%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity, 2018</b>		
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	87.3%	68.0%
Black, not Hispanic or Latino	0.6%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, not Hispanic or Latino	1.6%	1.9%
Asian, not Hispanic or Latino	1.8%	9.3%
Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, not Hispanic or Latino	0.2%	0.8%
Two or more races, not Hispanic or Latino	4.2%	4.8%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	5.3%	12.9%

## 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 9 percent of adults in the county failed to finish high school (vs. 12 percent nationally), and 19 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher (vs. 31 percent nationally).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [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](#)

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.