

Wahkiakum County profile



by Scott Bailey, regional labor economist - *updated November 2017*

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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, OR. As a result, the county has kept a largely rural feel, with much of its land devoted to forests.

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Geographic facts

(Source: *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*)

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

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Outlook

Wahkiakum County had the largest percentage drop in employment of any county in the state during the 2008-09 recession. Since hitting bottom, there has been very little change in job counts. That situation doesn't look to change significantly any time soon.

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Labor force and unemployment

(Source: Employment Security Department)

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries page](#).

The county labor force was estimated at 1,296 in 2016, with an unemployment rate of 9.0 percent, the same as in 2015. Unemployment peaked most recently at 15.3 percent in 2010, after rising from the cyclical low of 7.2 percent in 2006. Preliminary estimates for the first half of 2017 show a drop of more than a point from 2016.

According to the Census Bureau's On The Map program, over three-fourths of the county's employed residents worked outside the county in 2014, 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 46 percent of earned income in the county comes from residents holding jobs outside the county, while 14 percent of wages at county employers goes to workers who live outside of the county.

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Industry employment

(Source: Employment Security Department)

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries page](#).

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 90 jobs in 2016, was 50 below its mid-2000's level. Construction (60 jobs) was a bit higher, while manufacturing (50 jobs) and trade, transportation & utilities (60 jobs) employed about the same number as before the recession. Most of the job loss was in the "all other services" category, which dropped from 280 jobs in 2008 to 160 jobs in 2016. 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 (180).

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

Industry employment by age and gender

(Source: The Local Employment Dynamics)

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 is presented by place of work, not place of residence. Some highlights:

For jobs located in Wahkiakum County in 2016, about 54 percent were held by males, and 46 percent by females—while the state was split closer to 52/48. Three industries in the county are dominated by male workers: agriculture/logging (86 percent male), construction (81 percent) and manufacturing (62 percent). Women were predominant in hospitality (74 percent) and education (66 percent). Wahkiakum's workforce was much older than the state average, with 33 percent aged 55 and older, versus 22 percent statewide.

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Wages and income

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

In 2016, Wahkiakum employers paid out \$23.9 million in wages, a 3 percent drop from 2015. Employment also declined slightly, but not as much. As a result, the average annual wage for jobs in the county fell by 1 percent to \$34,186. That was only one percent more than in 1999 after adjustment for inflation.

The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Wahkiakum County was \$21.02 in 2016. That was an inflation-adjusted 48 cents (2 percent) higher than 2015. An increase in the median hourly wage coupled with a decrease in the average annual wage means that the total hours worked declined. Wahkiakum's median was below the median for the entire state but higher than the rest of the state if King County was excluded. Wahkiakum matched the state median back in 1998, but wages have grown slowly since then.

Household income has been on the upswing of late. The county's median household income for the 2011-15 time period was \$44,485, 2 percent above the median for the 2006-10 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 2015, county per capita income was \$36,153. That was 30 percent below the state average, and 25 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state and nation has been widening steadily for 40 years. Wahkiakum residents are much more dependent upon investment income and transfer payments like Social Security and Medicare than most areas. A third of county income came from transfer payments in 2015, more than twice that of the state and nation.

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Population

(Source: *Office of Financial Management*)

Wahkiakum's population was estimated at 4,030 in 2017, with little change over the past decade. Over the past decade, population has grown by 0.2 percent a year on average, about a quarter of the national rate and a fifth of the state rate.

Population facts

(Source: *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*)

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population 2017	4,030	7,310,300
Population 2010	3,978	6,724,543
Percent change, 2010 to 2017	1.3%	11.9%

Age, gender and ethnicity

(Source: *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*)

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, versus 27 percent statewide.
- 24 percent was aged 40 to 59, almost the same as the state's 26 percent.
- 42 percent was aged 60 or older, double the state average of 21 percent.

The county is also less diverse: in 2016, 91 percent of the population was white and non-Hispanic.

Demographics

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population by age, 2016		
Under 5 years old	3.7%	6.2%
Under 18 years old	16.3%	23.5%
65 years and older	32.3%	14.9%
Females, 2016	48.9%	50.0%
Race/ethnicity, 2016		
White, non-Hispanic	91.3%	69.7%
Black	0.2%	3.6%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.1%	1.3%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.0%	8.7%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	3.6%	12.6%

Educational attainment

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts)

Wahkiakum residents are less likely to have a college degree, and also less likely to have dropped out of high school. Only 8 percent of adults in the county failed to finish high school (vs. 13 percent nationally), and 15 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher (vs. 30 percent nationally).

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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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