

Wahkiakum County profile



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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 15 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, 2020 (square miles)	262.9	37
People per square mile, 2020	16.9	30

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Wahkiakum County employment increased by 30 jobs in 2021, from 730 to 760 jobs, and has maintained at that level, aside from a temporary dip in the COVID-19 recession. The most likely scenario over the next few years is for only small changes in total employment.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on Employment Security Department's labor market information website.

The county labor force was estimated at 1,363 in 2021, with an unemployment rate of 6.6 percent, down a tenth from the pre-COVID-19 2019 average. Unemployment jumped to 14.5 percent in April 2020, the height of the COVID-19 recession, before steadily falling to normal levels.

According to the Census Bureau, just over half (55 percent) of the county’s employed residents worked outside the county in the 2016 to 2020 period, including 17 percent who worked out of state, mostly in Oregon.

Bureau of Economic Analysis data shows that 59 percent of earned income in the county in 2020 came from residents holding jobs outside the county, while 21 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.

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 before rising slowly to 760 jobs in 2018. Logging employment, at 70 jobs in 2021, was about half of its mid-2000s level. Construction (50 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 190 jobs in 2021. Part of the decline was due to the closure of the Columbia Care Center nursing home. Government employed 290, mostly in K-12 schools (80) and other local agencies like the county government (190). In 2020, the recession led to small job losses in the service sector and in local government.

COVID-19 led to a loss of 30 jobs in 2020, but employment rebounded back to 760 jobs (same as 2019) in 2021, with trade, transportation and utilities gaining 20 jobs and government losing 20 over those two years.

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

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment by age and gender

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database is a joint project of state employment departments and the Census Bureau. It matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and sex. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included. Federal workers and non-covered workers like the self-employed are not. Data is presented by place of work, not place of residence.

Wahkiakum County highlights:

For jobs located in Wahkiakum County in 2020, 52 percent were held by males, and 48 percent by females – while the state was split closer to 51/49. Two industries in the county were dominated by male workers: agriculture/logging (81 percent male) and construction (86 percent). Women were predominant in finance and insurance (82 percent), technical services (71 percent) and health care (71 percent). The average wage for female workers was 78 percent of the average for male workers.

Wahkiakum’s workforce was much older than the state average, with 32 percent aged 55 and older, versus 23 percent statewide.

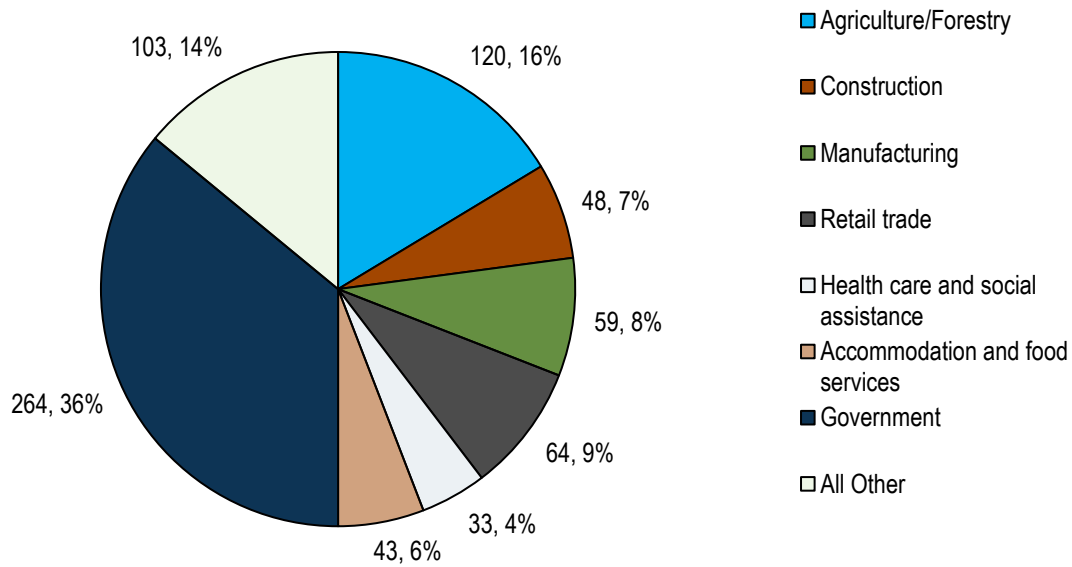
Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

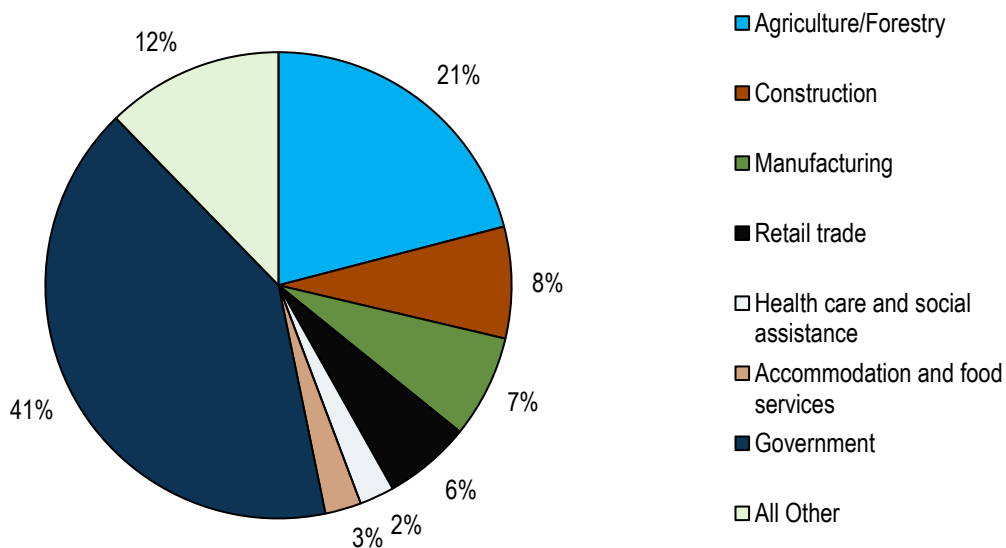
In 2021, Wahkiakum employers paid out \$30.6 million in wages, a 2.8 percent increase over 2020. The average annual wage for jobs in the county rose to \$41,684, an inflation-adjusted 3.7 percent above 2020, and the highest on record.

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 16 percent of the jobs in the county, and 21 percent of total wages.

Covered employment in 2021



Covered wages in 2021



The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Wahkiakum County was \$24.68 in 2021, an inflation-adjusted 0.8 percent above the 2020 level. Wahkiakum’s median was almost \$6 per hour below the median for the entire state, and a bit more than a dollar an hour below the rest of the state if King County is excluded. Wahkiakum topped the state median back in 1997, but wages have grown at a slower pace since then.

Median household income averaged \$53,277 for the 2015 to 2019 period – substantially higher than the \$47,538 inflation-adjusted median for the 2010 to 2014 period. Median family income was up 25.0 percent (to \$66,169) 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 2020, county per capita income was \$47,027. That was 30 percent below the state average and 21 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 transfer payments like Social Security and Medicare than most areas: 34 percent of county income came from transfer payments in 2020, almost twice that of the state’s 18 percent. On a per capita basis, the differences were mostly due to Wahkiakum’s older population: higher Social Security and Medicare payments. The county has higher per capita Veterans’ benefits as well.

Per capita transfer payments, 2020

Per capita transfer payments	U.S.	State	Wahkiakum
Total	\$12,872	\$12,112	\$16,147
Social Security benefits	\$3,272	\$3,231	\$6,185
Medicare benefits	\$2,486	\$2,008	\$3,945
Public assistance medical care benefits	\$2,035	\$1,814	\$1,821
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits	\$176	\$137	\$178
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$254	\$226	\$230
Unemployment insurance compensation	\$1,630	\$1,599	\$764
Veterans' benefits	\$442	\$526	\$747
All Other	\$2,578	\$2,569	\$2,276

Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Economic Analysis

Population

Wahkiakum’s population was estimated at 4,525 in 2022. That was an increase of 50 residents over 2021 (+1.1 percent). Over the past decade, the county has grown at a faster rate than the national average (1.1 percent per year, vs. 0.6 percent). The official state forecast had the county losing population from 2017 forward, which obviously hasn’t happened. That’s because despite having more deaths than births every year since 1995 – due to its older population – the county has had a steady influx of new residents.

Population facts

	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Population 2010	3,978	6,724,540
Population 2020	4,422	7,707,047
Population 2022	4,525	7,864,000
Percent change, 2010 to 2022	13.8%	17.0%

Source: Office of Financial Management

Age, race and ethnicity

Wahkiakum's population is much older than the state and nation. In 2021:

- 19.5 percent of the county was below the age of 20, versus 24.1 percent statewide.
- 15.2 percent was aged 20 to 39, a little more than half the statewide average of 27.5 percent.
- 21.4 percent was aged 40 to 59, almost the same as the state's 24.8 percent.
- 43.8 percent was aged 60 or older, double the state average of 23.6 percent.

The county is also less diverse: in 2021, 86.1 percent of the population was white and non-Latino, compared with 63.7 percent in Washington; and 4.6 percent was Latino, vs. 14.0 percent statewide.

Source: Office of Financial Management

Demographics

Population by age, 2021	Wahkiakum County	Washington state
Under 20 years old	19.5%	24.1%
20 to 39 years old	15.2%	27.5%
40 to 59 years old	21.4%	24.8%
60 years and older	43.8%	23.6%
Population by race/ethnicity, 2021		
White, non-Hispanic	86.1%	63.7%
Black, any ethnicity	0.6%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, any ethnicity	1.6%	1.9%
Asian, any ethnicity	1.1%	9.9%
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander, any ethnicity	0.1%	0.9%
Two or more races, any ethnicity	7.7%	10.2%
Latino, any race	4.6%	14.0%

Source 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. Over the 2016 to 2020 period, only 7.3 percent of adults in the county failed to finish high school (vs. 11.5 percent nationally), and 20.3 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher (vs. 32.9 percent nationally).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

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.