

Ferry County profile

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Overview

Regional context

Ferry County, named for Governor Ferry, was carved out of Stevens County in 1899. The county is bordered to its north by British Columbia and Lincoln County to its south. Okanogan County lies to the west and Stevens County to the east. Ferry County is sparsely populated. This rural economy is defined by limited transportation routes and its dependence on natural resources. The Colville Confederated Tribe owns the southern portion of the county, and the northern portion is largely part of the Colville National Forest. Less than 18 percent of the land in Ferry County is privately owned.

Local economy

Ferry County was settled after the discovery of gold in the 1850s. As this gold rush came to an end around 1900, lumber began to play a major role in Ferry County's early history. In 1907, President Roosevelt created a system of national forests. The newly recognized Colville National Forest made up the northern half of Ferry County. Ferry County remained remote and inaccessible until roads and communication systems were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Lake Roosevelt was also developed in the 1930s, which spurred employment, electricity and irrigation.

Ferry County and particularly the town of Republic, have relied on mining for decades. The Republic mines were the major producers of gold in the state for many years in the 20th century. Since 2018, the mines were maintained but not in production. A drop in county employment was expected, but federal, state and local government job increases on public lands, such as the United States Forest Service (USFS) and wood production, have mitigated job loss. However, job growth has been negative.

Geographic facts

	Ferry County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,203.16	9
People per square mile, 2010	3.4	38

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The economy of Ferry County has remained static with little change over time. The lack of economic growth is reflected in slow population growth, an older than average population and negative real employment growth. Ferry County continues to be plagued by limited transportation and little private land. These issues limit growth of resource extraction as well as overall economic activity. The largest employer in Ferry County, a gold mine near Republic, closed in 2018. The indirect impact of the closure, due to the lost high-wage jobs, will impact local businesses and schools. However, a trend of unemployed miners working in other mines around the country, but continuing to keep their residencies in Ferry County, will help offset lost jobs and wages. Still, Ferry County is likely to experience decreases in employment and income.

Labor force and unemployment

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

The civilian labor force in 2021 (2,302) decreased compared to 2020 (2,432). Ferry, a rural county, was one of the first counties in the state to enter the phase three business re-openings because of the low incidence of the virus (COVID-19) in the county. This helped mitigate the Ferry County labor force in 2020 during the pandemic. However, the county has a high average worker age, retirements have accelerated which is reducing the labor force in 2022.

The county unemployment rate for 2021 was 8.9 percent, partially due to the drop in labor force. In 2020, the rate was 11.6 percent. The unemployment rate peaked in 2010 at 17.5 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

Ferry County has 1,690 nonfarm jobs located in the county. Many employed residents work in jobs or for firms located outside the county.

Total nonfarm jobs in 2021 decreased by 90 jobs from 2020.

- Goods-producing employment averaged 190 jobs in 2021, a decrease from the 2020 annual average of 240. Many of these lost jobs were in manufacturing.
- Service-providing employment averaged 1,430 jobs in 2021, a decrease over the 2020 annual average of 1,460.

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

Source: Employment Security Department/ DATA Division

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.

Ferry County highlights:

The largest job holder age group in Ferry County in 2020 was the 45 to 54 cohort at 21.7 percent. This percentage was closely followed by job holders aged 55 to 64, with 21.3 percent of the workforce.

In 2020, men held 48.6 percent of the jobs in Ferry County, and women held 51.4 percent. There were substantial differences in gender dominance by industry.

- Male-dominated industries included transportation and warehousing (83.9 percent), construction (82.9 percent) and manufacturing (76.6 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (90.0 percent), health care and social assistance (67.1 percent) and accommodation and food services (62.3 percent).

Source: Employment Security Department/ DATA Division, County Data Tables

Wages and income

In 2020, there were 1,701 jobs covered by unemployment insurance with a total payroll of over \$74.0 million.

The 2020 average annual wage was \$43,447, well below the state's average annual wage of \$76,801.

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, the per capita personal income was \$39,899 in Ferry County, less than the state (\$67,126). Ferry County has ranked 39th in the state in terms of per capital personal income.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, the median household income was \$41,685 in 2016 to 2020, less than the median for the state at \$77,006.

In the period 2016 to 2020, 18.4 percent of Ferry County's population was living below the poverty level, higher than the state's level of 9.5 percent according to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts.

Source: Employment Security Department/ DATA Division; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Population

Ferry County's population was estimated at 7,273 in 2021. It grew at a rate of 1.3 percent from 2020 to 2021 compared to the state's growth rate of 0.4 percent.

The largest city in Ferry County is Republic.

Population facts

	Ferry County	Washington state
Population 2021	7,273	7,738,692
Population 2020	7,178	7,705,281
Percent change, 2020 to 2021	1.3%	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Ferry County has an older population than does the state.

- In Ferry County, those 65 and older made up 28.2 percent of Ferry County’s 2021 population compared to the state’s 15.9 percent.
- Residents under 18 made up 16.4 percent of Ferry County’s population compared to 21.8 percent for the state.

Ferry County showed less diversity in 2020 than did the state in all racial/ethnic categories except American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Colville Confederated Tribe owns a significant portion of the county.

Demographics

	Ferry County	Washington state
Population by age, 2021		
Under 5 years old	4.4%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	16.4%	21.8%
65 years and older	28.2%	15.9%
Females, 2021	48.6%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2021		
White	76.1%	78.5%
Black	0.8%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	16.6%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, & other Pacific Islander	1.4%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	4.8%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

Most Ferry County residents aged 25 and older (89.9 percent) were high school graduates, which compares with 91.7 percent of Washington state’s residents, over the period 2016 to 2020.

Those with a bachelor’s degree or higher made-up 21.2 percent of Ferry County residents aged 25 and older compared to 36.7 percent of state residents over the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation](#)
- [Ferry County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Ferry County home page](#)
- [Ferry County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Ferry County History and Information](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Tri County Economic Development District](#)

- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)
- [Northeast Washington Trends](#)

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.