

# Jefferson County Profile



By Jim Vleming  
Regional labor economist  
*Updated March 2021*

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

## Overview

### *Regional context*

Jefferson County is located on the Olympic Peninsula in northwestern Washington state. Jefferson County is nestled between the Admiralty Inlet and Clallam, Mason, Grays Harbor and Kitsap counties. It faces the Pacific Ocean to the west and Hood Canal to the east. Named for President Thomas Jefferson, it was created in 1852 from a portion of Lewis County. The county seat is Port Townsend.

Much of the county is publicly owned land. About 60.0 percent of the county comprises the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest and roughly 20.0 percent is under the jurisdiction of federal and state agencies. The Hoh Reservation and a small corner of the Quinault Reservation are also located in Jefferson County.

Jefferson County is a mid-sized county, ranking 18th in the state in land area. Its population density, as measured by people per square mile, ranks 29th among the other counties.

### *Local economy*

Jefferson County's current economic base grew from a rich history of natural resources extraction including logging and fishing in the late 1880s. By the turn of the 20th century, sawmills, fish processing and shipbuilding were firmly established in the coastal areas of the county. The county also was known for smuggling spirits from Canada in and out of the county's many hidden coves and forests during prohibition.

Port Townsend, the economic center of the county, has experienced periods of boom and bust over the century due to its dependency on these volatile industries. During 2011, Port Townsend finally started to recover from the Great Recession with visible signs of economic growth including new shops, new investments and rebounds in tourism. Annual taxable sales in the county have grown strongly since 2013. In 2018, the port of Port Townsend had the highest revenue in five years for its major operating units.

The economy of Jefferson County is comprised of both an industrial and an agricultural base. Industrially, the county's history, climate and terrain supports healthy forest products and maritime sectors, including lumber, fish processing, ship repair and maintenance as well as ship and boatbuilding. The agricultural base encompasses tree farms for logging, aquaculture and a flourishing organic farming sector. Food production, stemming from this growing agricultural segment, includes artisan cheeses and breads. Tourism also provides revenue streams to the county. Economic activity is supported by a vibrant port and airport, ferry terminal and state highways.

A recent development is the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone (ECOZ), which consists of a diverse group of geographical census tracts intended to make the Olympic Coast more attractive to investors. Working together, ECOZ is catalyzing economic development in rural areas by engaging with communities and connecting the best opportunities with private capital.

This Opportunity Zone is a unique collaboration of five Tribal Nations, four cities, two counties (Clallam and Jefferson) and two port authorities that spans 14 federally designated Opportunity Zone census tracts. Together, the partners of the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone are building a deal “engine” of community-driven projects that both present good investments but also create good jobs, construct affordable and high-end housing, and support innovative entrepreneurs.

## Geographic facts

	Jefferson County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,803.7	18
People per square mile, 2010	16.6	29

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Outlook

The outlook for Jefferson County for 2020 was going to be one of many challenges, and then came March and suddenly the hill to climb became a lot steeper. The COVID-19 pandemic arrived and set the world upside down. Unemployment rates in the county spiked from 5.3 percent in March to 17.4 percent in April. By December 2020, they had continued retreating to 8.2 percent. Nonfarm payrolls retreated by 15.2 percent from December 2019 to December 2020. The largest year-over-year losses were in the construction (48.6 percent) and leisure and hospitality (30.3 percent) sectors. Look to the first quarter of 2021 to see any turn-around in this trend.

## Labor force and unemployment

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

The 2020 CLF was 12,885, up from the 2019 level of 12,835.

This increase follows a reversal of years past where the labor force was shrinking. The labor force has been expanding since 2014. While the increases have been modest, they have been heading in the right direction over the last several years.

The 2020 figures show an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent compared to 5.6 percent in 2019. The unemployment rate, due to the pandemic, spiked in April 2020 at 19.0 percent and fell as the year progressed. The 2021 data points to a return to single digit unemployment.

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.

In Jefferson County, the nonfarm sector averaged 8,710 jobs in 2020. That is 500 jobs fewer than in 2019, with COVID-19 the main culprit in the drop in nonfarm payrolls.

- The goods-producing sector was down 130 jobs year over year with both construction and manufacturing taking losses over the year.
- The service-providing sector lost 370 jobs in 2020. The leisure and hospitality sector took the brunt of the COVID-19 shutdown shedding 280 jobs over the year.

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.

#### *Jefferson County highlights:*

The population of Jefferson County is older than that of the state, which is also reflected in the labor force figures. Over 30.2 percent of the workforce was age 55 or older in 2019.

- Those aged 55 and older dominated the utilities, educational services and transportation services jobs, while younger workers (14 to 24) made up the bulk of accommodation and food services positions.

When looking at all industries, men held 47.9 percent of the jobs while women made up 52.1 of all workers in 2019. Despite this imbalance, males in the county tended to be employed in higher-wage jobs in what are generally considered traditionally male fields such as manufacturing and construction. There are wide differences in the composition of industry sector by gender in Jefferson County.

- Male-dominated industries included construction (77.8 percent), manufacturing (69.1percent), agriculture, and forestry and fishing and hunting (70.4 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (77.5 percent), healthcare and social assistance (79.1 percent) and educational services (71.1 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

## **Wages and income**

In 2019, Jefferson County had 9,153 jobs covered by the unemployment insurance system, with a payroll of over \$386 million.

The 2019 average annual wage for Jefferson County was \$42,203, below the state's average of \$69,615.

The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$21.77, less than that of the state's median hourly wage at \$25.98 and for the state less King County at \$22.37.

Median household income, according to the 2015 to 2019 U.S. Census, was \$55,127, well below that of the state's \$73,775. The national figure was \$62,843.

### *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.

Per capita personal income in Jefferson County in 2019 was \$55,447 compared to \$64,758 for the state and \$56,490 for the nation. Jefferson County ranked eighth in the state in 2019 in per capita income. It ranked 12th in 2014.

The median household income in Jefferson County was \$55,127 during the period surveyed between 2015 and 2019. The county's median was less than the state's (\$73,775) and the nation's (\$62,843) over this same period.

Over the period 2015 through 2019, 13.0 percent of those in the county were living below the poverty level compared to 10.8 percent of the state population and 13.4 percent of the U.S. population in the period 2015 through 2019. The state and national rates are not directly comparable to the county rate because they each use different data sources.

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

## **Population**

The population of Jefferson County was 32,190 in 2020. It grew from 29,872 in 2010.

Jefferson County's largest city, Port Townsend, had a population of 9,665 in 2020, up from 9,113 in 2010, an increase of 552 people.

### *Population facts*

	<b>Jefferson County</b>	<b>Washington state</b>
Population 2020	32,190	7,656,200
Population 2010	29,872	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2020	7.76%	13.85%

Source: Office of Financial Management

### *Age, gender and ethnicity*

Jefferson County's population was older than the population of the state in 2019.

- The county's residents in the 65 and older category made up 37.9 percent of its population compared to 15.9 percent of the state's population.
- There were proportionately fewer young residents in Jefferson County compared to the state.

Females made up 51.1 percent of the county's population compared to 49.9 percent in the state in 2019.

The population is less diverse than the state's, except for American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

## Demographics

	Jefferson County	Washington state
<b>Population by age, 2019</b>		
Under 5 years old	2.9%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	11.8%	21.8%
65 years and older	37.9%	15.9%
<b>Females, 2019</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>49.9%</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity, 2019</b>		
White	91.1%	78.5%
Black	1.1%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2.2%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	2.2%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	3.8%	13.0%

## Educational attainment

Most of Jefferson County residents age 25 and older (95.1 percent) were high school graduates, which compares favorably with 91.3 percent of Washington state's residents and 88.0 percent of U.S. residents in the period 2015 to 2019.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 44.3 percent of Jefferson County residents age 25 and older compared to 36.0 percent of state residents and 32.1 percent of U.S. residents over the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Jefferson County Economic Development Council](#)
- [Visit Jefferson County](#)
- [Jefferson County History](#)
- [Jefferson County home page](#)
- [Jefferson County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Jefferson County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Olympic Consortium WorkSource](#)
- [Port of Port Townsend](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)
- [Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone](#)
- [City of Port Townsend](#)

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.