

Lewis 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

Lewis County, located in southwestern Washington, is the sixth largest county in the state. The Chehalis and Cowlitz rivers are the two major rivers in the county. Lewis, named for Meriwether Lewis, was created as a county in 1845. Its original borders encompassed half of Washington state and British Columbia. The Chehalis and Meshall tribal people inhabited this area prior to white explorers and settlers, but their numbers were decimated by disease. Many of these settlers worked in the trading posts as well as the Hudson Bay commercial farm that provided the trading posts.

Local economy

Once the railroad was established, logging and milling attracted immigrants and in-migrants. Labor organizers were outraged by the unsafe working conditions and low wages in this industry. In 1919, a gun battle erupted between members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and some World War I veterans and is known as the “Centralia Massacre.”

The 1920s brought hard times to Lewis County before the Great Depression took hold. World War II increased the demand for wood and farm products, lifting the county economy again. Its economy has continued boom and bust cycles over its recent history, as noted below.

Geographic facts

	Lewis County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,402.8	6
People per square mile, 2010	31.4	22

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The Great Recession was difficult on the Lewis County economy, as nonfarm payrolls dropped, and double-digit unemployment rates were the rule rather than the exception. In 2014, payrolls started to increase from that downturn. Then in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and payrolls dropped again. Nonfarm job growth stopped, and the unemployment rose sharply beginning in April. The year 2021 brought relief from the 2020 pandemic numbers as nonfarm employment and unemployment rates stabilized and began to turn the corner.

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.

Average annual unemployment in Lewis County has been declining since the 13.3 percent rate posted in 2009. In 2020 that trend reversed, as the average annual unemployment rate rose from 6.3 percent in 2019 to a figure of 9.4 percent in 2020. The 2021 rate rebounded to mirror the 6.3 of 2019.

Since 2014, the labor force in the county has steadily grown, currently up over 4,200 above 2014 totals. This gain in the labor force may indicate a continued faith in the local economy as well as a more positive job market. Unemployment rates fought double digits for some of 2020, but 2021 saw a renewed labor market outlook and much more favorable rates.

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 Lewis County, 2020 nonfarm job numbers declined across the board. Specifically, there were on average 25,470 nonfarm jobs in the county in 2020, compared to 26,480 in 2019. The 2021 totals saw an increase of 370 over the 2020 totals.

The service-producing sector employed 20,740 in 2021, compared to 20,450 in 2020. The goods-producing sector employed 5,100 in 2021, compared to 5,020 in 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns can be seen up and down nonfarm industry employment totals in 2020, but 2021 data shows the numbers stabilizing.

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.

Lewis County highlights:

In 2020, the largest job holder age group in Lewis County was the 55 and older age category, making up 26.2 percent of employment across all industries. The next largest share was among people age 35 to 44 with 21.5 percent of employment.

- In 2020, the county's workers mirrored state patterns with workers age 14 to 24 dominating the accommodation and food services jobs in the county with over 32.3 percent of the positions. This age group was also well represented in arts, entertainment and recreation and retail trade.

- Workers in the 55 and older age category were prevalent in mining, educational services, transportation and warehousing, real estate and rental and leasing, public administration and utilities.

Females made up 48.4 percent of the labor force in Lewis County, with males making up the difference at 51.6 percent in 2020. Men were more often represented in higher-paying industries.

- Male-dominated industries included mining (88.4 percent), construction (81.3 percent), manufacturing (82.1 percent) and utilities (82.7 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included finance and insurance (78.4 percent), health care and social assistance (79.8 percent) and educational services (72.2 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2020, there were 25,922 jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Lewis County, with a total payroll of over \$1.2 billion dollars.

Lewis County's average annual wage in 2020 was \$48,214 below the state's average of \$73,504.

The median hourly wage in 2020 was \$23.64, below the state's median hourly wage of \$29.28 and the state excluding the King County median hourly wage of \$25.01.

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.

Personal income in 2020 lagged both the state and nation, as Lewis County's per capita personal income was \$47,752. The U.S. average was \$59,510 and the state average was \$67,126.

The median household income in Lewis County was \$58,911 in 2019. The county's median was less than the state's (\$78,687) and the nation's (\$65,712).

In 2019, 11.6 percent of Lewis County's population was living below the poverty level, compared to 9.8 percent in the state and 12.3 percent in the nation. 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, American Community Survey

Population

The Lewis County population was 82,700 in 2021, up over 7,000 from 2010. The largest city is Centralia, with a population of 18,280 in 2021.

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

Population facts

	Lewis County	Washington state
Population 2021	82,700	7,766,975
Population 2010	75,455	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2021	6.35%	13.85%

Age, gender and ethnicity

When compared with the state, the Lewis County population is somewhat older, although it has a similar gender ratio. Far more residents identify themselves as white when compared to the state, and most other groups represent a lower proportion of the county population compared to the state as well.

Demographics

	Lewis County	Washington state
Population by age, 2020		
Under 5 years old	5.9%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	21.3%	21.8%
65 years and older	21.3%	15.9%
Females, 2020	49.9%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2020		
White	92.0%	78.5%
Black	0.9%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2.0%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.6%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	10.5%	13.0%

Educational attainment

Most Lewis County residents age 25 and older (89.4 percent) were high school graduates, which compares with 91.7 percent of Washington state's residents and 88.5 percent of U.S. residents in the period 2016 to 2020.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 19.1 percent of Lewis County residents age 25 and older compared to 36.7 percent of state residents and 32.9 percent of U.S. residents during the same period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Lewis County home page](#)
- [Lewis County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Lewis County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Lewis Economic Development Council](#)

- Centralia – Chehalis Chamber of Commerce
- Port of Centralia
- Port of Chehalis
- Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State
- Lewis County on ChooseWashington.com
- Centralia College

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.