

Pend Oreille County profile



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Overview

Regional context

Pend Oreille County (pronounced “pon-der-ay”) is in the northeast corner of Washington. The county is bound by Canada to its north and Idaho to its east. Most of the county is dominated by the rugged, mountainous Colville National Forest. The southern part of the county has forested foothills as well as drier hills and valleys. The Pend Oreille River runs the length of the county, providing electric power and recreation for the area.

Land policies influence economic development in Pend Oreille County, especially changes regarding timber land management and mining. Only 36 percent of land in the county is privately owned and about 58 percent is owned by the federal government. There is also a Kalispell reservation in Usk in central Pend Oreille.

Pend Oreille County is unique in terms of population density, transportation, industries and infrastructure. It is very rural with only 9.3 people per square mile and has a rural economy, with limited transportation routes and dependence on natural resources, specifically, lead and zinc mining followed by timber and cement manufacturing. These realities greatly affect job growth and job creation.

Local economy

Pend Oreille County was largely settled after the discovery of gold in the 1850s in the northern part of the county. This gold strike failed to become a major gold rush. The real mining riches were found in other hard-rock minerals: lead and zinc.

Timber became a major industry once railroad access was developed. A cement manufacturing industry also developed, benefiting from natural deposits of limestone and quartz in the northern part of the county. Much of this resource extraction was first made possible by using the Pend Oreille River for transportation, then by railroad and eventually by state highways.

Two major employment sectors in Pend Oreille County are manufacturing and government. Government employment accounts for more than 50 percent of all jobs and will increase slightly in 2022. Manufacturing employment remains weak due to improved technology and efficiencies allowing manufacturers to increase production without an increase in employment.

Geographic facts

	Pend Oreille County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,399.99	25
People per square mile, 2010	9.3	33

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

The employment in Pend Oreille County was affected by the most recent recession, beginning in 2008. The recovery has been long, slow and painful. Growth over the last several years has dropped off, with small pockets of gains, but nowhere near the amount needed to replace the total employment at the peak of the business cycle.

With the 2019 announcement of layoffs in mining, employment is expected to decrease. In addition, the workforce serving Pend Oreille's major industries presents challenges because current workers have a high average age, increasing the need for replacement workers as they begin retiring.

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.

The civilian labor force decreased in 2021 to 5,135. However, the number of employed residents posted an increase of 92. Pend Oreille, 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 Pend Oreille County during the pandemic. However, because the county has a high average worker age, retirements have accelerated which is reducing the labor force.

The county unemployment rate for 2021 was 7.6 percent, due to the drop in the labor force. In 2020, the rate was 10.1 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.

Pend Oreille County is a rural labor market with 2,835 jobs located in the county in 2020. Consequently, a large number (about a third) of the employed residents work in jobs at firms located outside the county. It is likely that the suburban expansion of Spokane into Pend Oreille County explains part of this, but it also reflects a higher level of commuting by residents for jobs outside the county.

Current data for 2021 is not yet available. Pend Oreille is part of the Spokane MSA; data is delayed to breakout out the county from the MSA. We expect that 2021 will show a decrease in jobs due to retirements, decreases in manufacturing and government, and the generally downward trend since 2018.

- Goods-producing employment averaged 300 jobs in 2020 decreasing from 2019. Manufacturing jobs decreased by 70.

- Service-providing employment averaged 2,535 jobs in 2020, decreasing from 2019. The decrease came in government jobs. Health services did increase an upward trend.

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.

Pend Oreille County highlights:

The two-largest job holder age groups in Pend Oreille County in 2020 was the 45 to 54-year-olds at 22.7 percent of the workforce, and job holders aged 55 to 64 with 22.7 percent of the workforce.

In 2020, men held 44.4 percent and women held 55.6 percent of the jobs in Pend Oreille County. There were substantial differences in gender dominance by industry.

- Male-dominated industries included agriculture (79.3 percent), manufacturing (89.2 percent) and construction (84.9 percent).
- Female-dominated industries included health care and social assistance (80.3 percent), finance and insurance (64.2 percent) and educational services (72.6 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2020, there were 2,834 jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Pend Oreille County, with a total payroll of \$145.1 million.

The 2020 average annual wage was \$51,185, well below the state's average annual wage of \$76,801.

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

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 \$46,571, less than the state (\$67,126) and the nation (\$59,510).

According to the U.S. Census QuickFacts, the median household income was \$55,021 in 2016 to 2020. The county's median income was less than that of the state (\$77,006).

In 2016 through 2020, 14.7 percent of the county population was living below the poverty level, much higher than the state (9.5 percent).

Population

Pend Oreille County's population was 13,886 in 2021. From 2020 to 2021, the population increased at a rate of 3.6 percent compared to the state's growth rate of 0.4 percent.

The largest city in Pend Oreille County is Newport.

Population facts

	Pend Oreille County	Washington state
Population 2021	13,886	7,738,692
Population 2020	13,401	7,705,281
Percent change, 2020 to 2021	3.6%	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Age, gender and ethnicity

Pend Oreille County had an older population than the state reported in 2021.

- Pend Oreille County's population of those aged 65 and older was 26.9 percent compared to the state's 15.9 percent.
- The population under 18 years old was 19.1 percent in the county, less than that of the state's 21.8 percent.

Pend Oreille County showed much less diversity in 2021 than the state in all racial/ethnic categories except American Indians and Alaskan Natives. In Pend Oreille, American Indians and Alaskan Natives made up 3.7 percent of its population compared to 1.9 percent of the state's population.

Demographics

	Pend Oreille County	Washington state
Population by age, 2021		
Under 5 years old	4.7%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	19.1%	21.8%
65 years and older	26.9%	15.9%
Females, 2021	48.9%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2021		
White	91.1%	78.5%
Black	0.7%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	3.7%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	1.4%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	4.1%	13.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Educational attainment

Most Pend Oreille County residents aged 25 and older (90.7 percent) were high school graduates, which compares with 91.7 percent of Washington state's residents.

Those with a bachelor's degree or higher made up 21.1 percent of Pend Oreille County residents aged 25 and older compared to 36.7 percent of state residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Pend Oreille County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Pend Oreille County History](#)
- [Pend Oreille County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Pend Oreille County home page](#)
- [North Pend Oreille \(pronounced "pon-der-ay"\) Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [City of Newport](#)
- [Greater Newport Area Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Tri County Economic Development District](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Pend Oreille](#)
- [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.