

# Skamania County profile

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*Updated January 2021*



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## Overview

### *Regional context*

Skamania County is located about 40 miles east of the Portland metro area, in the beautiful Columbia River Gorge. Almost 90 percent of the county is timberland, mostly within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Much of the non-timber land is concentrated in the southern strip along the Columbia River, and falls under the protection of the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. As a result of these factors, the county has a small population and job base, and projections generally call for modest growth in jobs and population over the next 20 years.

### *Local economy*

Since time immemorial, what is now Skamania County was home to the Chilluckittequw people, who lived along the north bank of the Columbia River. When Europeans came to the area in the late 1700s, the diseases they brought devastated the Chilluckittequw, whose numbers dwindled from around 3,000 to a few hundred. In 1855, like many other indigenous people in the region, they were forced through treaties to give up the rights to their land. A brief rebellion in 1856 failed.

Skamania County was carved out of Clark County in 1854. White settlers had taken over the fishing grounds, and salmon canning became an important export. With the advent of the rail lines through the Columbia Gorge in the early 1900s, the timber industry took off. The construction of Bonneville Dam in the 1930s increased access to cheap power.

Thirty years ago, Skamania County's economy went through a wrenching transition. Long dependent upon timber for jobs and income, the county lost both when logging was curtailed on national forests, and the Stevenson Co-Ply, the county's largest employer (owned cooperatively by current and former workers), closed. Ten percent of the county's job base disappeared, and unemployment topped 22 percent in February 1992. But a year after the closure, the Skamania Lodge, a new destination resort subsidized by federal funds from the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area Act, opened, with almost the same number of jobs. The Gorge became a destination for a new sport – windsurfing. Almost overnight, Skamania had shifted from a timber economy to a tourist economy.

Employment changed little in the subsequent years, with a brief uptick late in the 1990s and a corresponding loss heading into the 2001 recession. Job growth picked up in 2002, but the Great Recession wiped out much of the gains. There has been little change in employment since 2009 – the closure of the Bonneville Hot Springs Resort did not help. A residential treatment center that was supposed to open in its stead has not yet materialized.

The transition from timber to tourism was accompanied by a shift in occupational structure, and generally lower wages and income (though official wage data do not include tips). In addition, ex-timber workers who commuted to Clark County for retraining discovered that the commute to the Portland area wasn't all that onerous. While the number of employed residents grew by about 15 percent during the 1990s, the number of those commuting to jobs outside of the county grew by almost 50 percent. In 2018, 77 percent of the county's earned income came from jobs outside of the county, easily the highest in the state.

## Geographic facts

	Skamania County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	1,655.68	24
People per square mile, 2010	6.73	35

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

## Outlook

Outside of the possible opening of a residential treatment center mentioned above, Skamania County will likely see slow but steady employment growth over the next few years.

## 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 county labor force was estimated at 5,339 in 2020, with an unemployment rate of 9.2 percent. That was well below the peak of 13.1 percent in the 2008 to 2009 recession. Unemployment during 2019 was little changed from 2018 and averaged 5.6 percent.

A majority of employed county residents work in another county. In the 2012 to 2016 period, 17 percent worked in Clark County, 15 percent in the Portland Metro area, 9 percent in Hood River, 7 percent in Klickitat County, and 4 percent in other counties. About one out of 6 jobs in the county were filled by commuters from other counties.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

## Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page.

Skamania County nonfarm employment grew steadily from 2002 to 2007, dropped sharply in 2008 to 2011, and has vacillated around 2,200 jobs since then. The county added 50 jobs in 2018, before losing 30 jobs in 2019. Over the 2002 to 2019 period, despite the ups and downs, private sector growth trended upward, averaging 1.7 percent per year. Job growth was concentrated in manufacturing (+100), hospitality (+110), construction (+60), and all other services (+70). On the downside, federal employment fell by 120 jobs and local non-educational government declined by 60 jobs.

In 2019, of the 2,250 jobs in the county, 30 percent (660) were public sector, a much higher proportion than for the state and nation. Leisure and hospitality (570, 26 percent) and manufacturing (300, 14 percent) dominated the private sector.

The major trends and events over the last 25 years include:

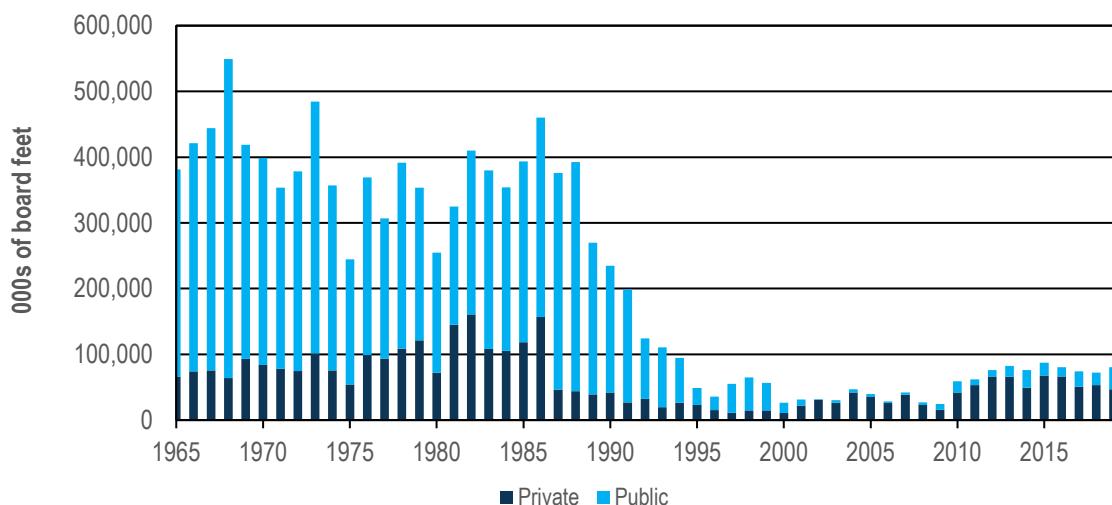
- Logging restrictions on federal lands curbed harvests in the early 1990s, leading to a loss of timber jobs. Timber harvests fell from around 400 million board feet in the 1980s to as low as 24 million board feet in 2009 before rebounding to 74 million board feet in 2017. Logging employment fell from almost 100 jobs in 1990 to only 10 in 2019.
- Stevenson Co-Ply, the county's largest employer at the time, closed in 1992.
- Skamania Lodge opened in 1993 and expanded in 2003. Tourist-related restaurants, retail and services have developed in the Stevenson area.
- The federal Wind River Nursery closed in the late 1990s.
- Molded Fiberglass, a trucking industry supplier, opened in 1995, had peak employment in 2000, but then closed after its major customer retrenched during the 2001 recession.
- Insitu moved about 100 jobs to Stevenson in August 2009, but these were transferred back to Klickitat County in 2014.
- The Bonneville Hot Springs Resort opened in North Bonneville in 2002 and then closed in early 2017. The planned reopening of the facility as an inpatient treatment center has been delayed.
- The brewing and winemaking industries emerged as a major employer.
- COVID-19 led to a sharp downturn in county employment in 2020, as the key tourism sector was hit hard.

Skamania County's agricultural production is a fairly small part of the county economy. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 145 farms in the county, covering 5,874 acres. The acreage was down about 10 percent from the 2012 Census. The county still had fewer acres in farmland than any county in the state.

Most of Skamania County is forestland. From 1965 to 1988, timber harvest averaged 386 million board feet a year. Over the last decade, the average plummeted to 75 million board feet, with most of the decline due to lower harvests on federal lands. Current timber harvest is well below historical levels.

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

#### *Skamania County timber harvest by ownership, 1965 to 2019*



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

Source: Washington Department of Natural Resources

### *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 is presented by place of work, not place of residence.

#### *Skamania County highlights:*

- Females held a majority (53.6 percent) of the non-federal jobs in Skamania County in 2019.
- Female-dominated industries included education (77 percent), accommodation and food services (59 percent) and retail trade (66 percent).
- Male dominated industries include manufacturing (74 percent) and construction (76 percent).
- Older workers (aged 55+) made up 25 percent of job holders in the county, a bit higher than the 23 percent statewide.
- Female workers earned an average of \$2,762 a month, 32 percent less than the average for male workers (\$3,946).

### *Industry employment by race/ethnicity*

The table below shows estimated employment by industry by the race or ethnicity of the worker holding the job. Some takeaways: Latinx were primarily employed in manufacturing, accommodations and food services, and real estate, rental and leasing. A third of Indigenous people worked in accommodations and food services. Asian Americans and African Americans worked in a diverse number of industries. Small numbers meant that data was suppressed in a number of industries and groups.

#### *Skamania County jobs by industry and by race/ethnicity of employee, 2019*

NAICS	Total*	White Non Latinx	African American	Native American	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Two or more races	Latinx
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>177</b>
11	52	31	2	0	0	0	0	16
21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
22	31	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	116	102	0	0	0	0	1	10
31-33	286	230	0	3	4	0	3	43
42	45	42	0	0	0	0	0	0
44-45	145	123	2	5	0	0	0	12
48-49	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
51	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
52	12	10	0	0	0	0	0	0

NAICS	Total*	White Non Latinx	African American	Native American	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Two or more races	Latinx
53	189	148	5	5	3	0	7	20
54	29	26	0	0	0	0	0	0
55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
56	16	13	0	0	0	0	0	1
61	266	245	0	2	1	0	8	6
62	144	117	5	2	6	0	2	11
71	23	22	0	0	0	0	0	0
72	540	470	6	11	6	0	14	34
81	47	38	0	0	2	0	0	5
Govt. Admin.	195	179	0	0	0	0	4	8

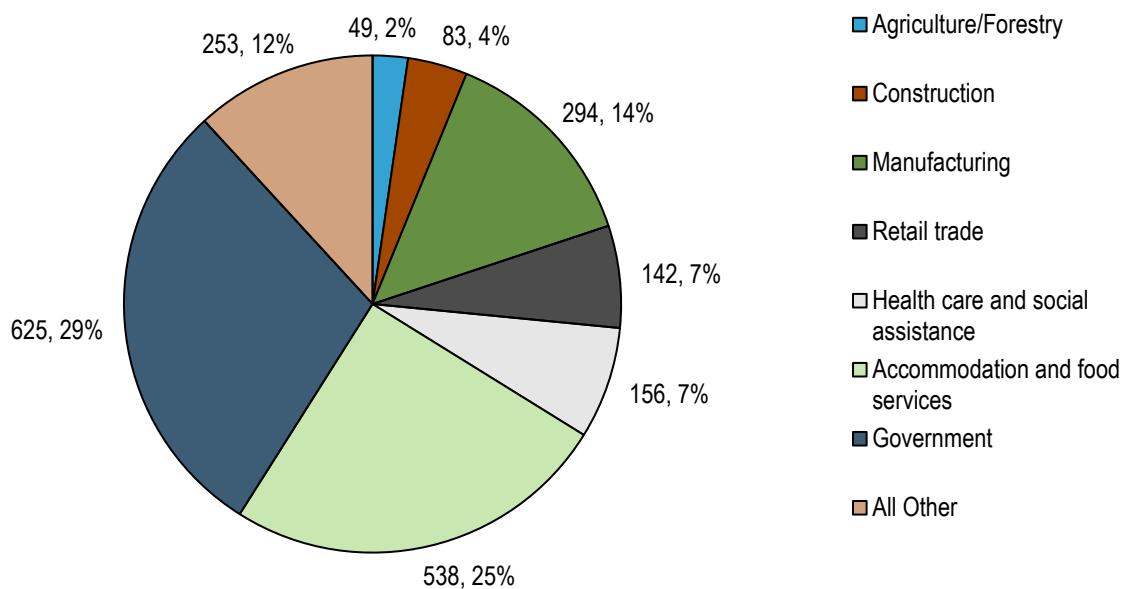
\* Includes all non-federal jobs covered by unemployment insurance; some government jobs (e.g., education) are shown under their NAICS (e.g., NAICS 61). Some data was suppressed, so lines and columns might not add to the total.

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics Database

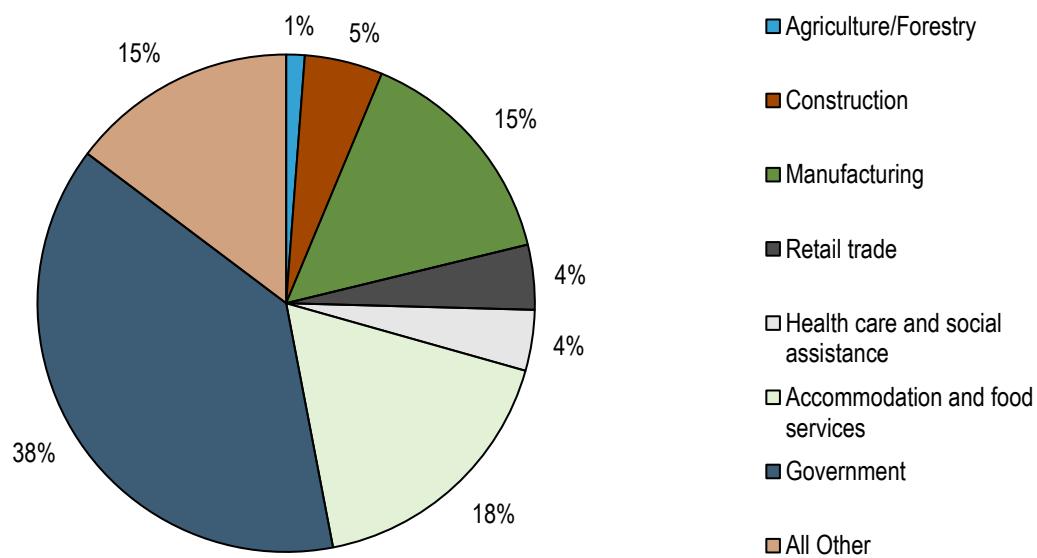
## Wages and income

The charts below contrast industry shares of employment and wages covered by unemployment insurance in the county. The biggest difference: government accounted for 29 percent of the jobs in the county, and 38 percent of total wages. The wage shares of retail trade, health care, and accommodations and food services were all below their employment shares. The average wage for all jobs in the county was \$39,120, for manufacturing: \$42,491. The county's average wage has trended upward very slowly over the past 20 years after factoring out inflation.

### Covered employment in 2019



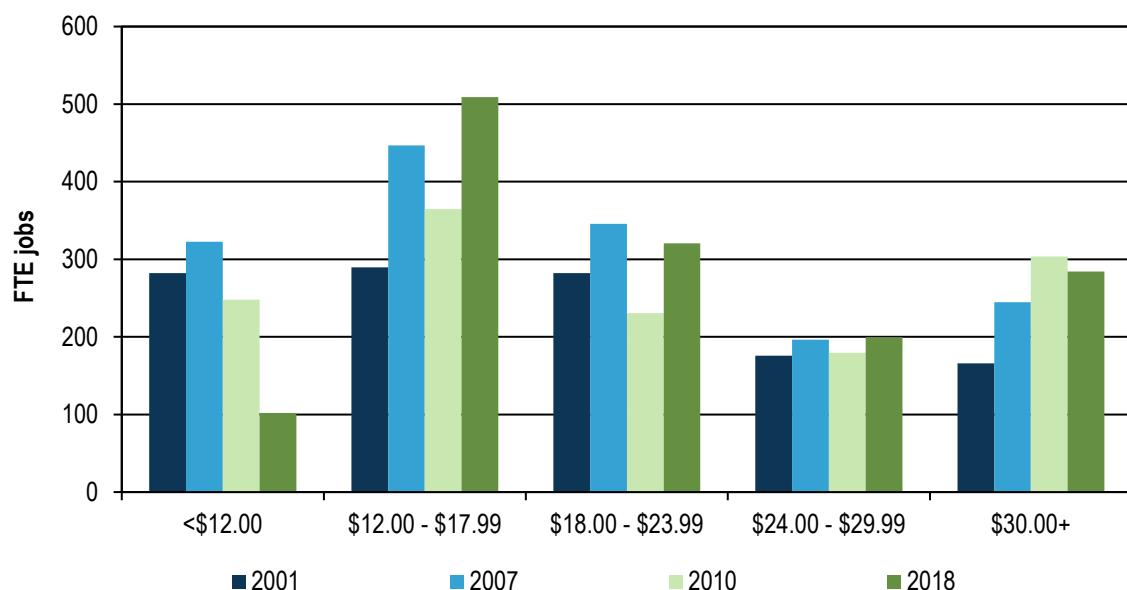
## *Covered wages in 2019*



The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Skamania County was \$19.51 in 2018, a slight decline from 2017 after adjustment for inflation. The county was more than \$2.00 per hour below the state average if King County were excluded.

Skamania has generally seen a positive shift in wages over the years. In 2001, almost a quarter of jobs located in the county paid below \$12.00 (adjusted for inflation) — that was down to 7 percent in 2018. There were more moderate-wage jobs (\$12.00 per hour to \$23.99 per hour) and more upper-wage jobs (\$30.00 per hour and up) in 2018 as well.

## *Full-time employment (FTE) jobs by hourly wage*



Median household income in Skamania for the 2015 to 2019 period jumped to \$65,181, significantly higher than the 2010 to 2014 average of \$54,467. Both the median household income and median family income (\$82,682) were above the national average.

Finally, the table below shows the average monthly wage for jobs in Skamania County by the race or ethnicity of the job holder. Wages for Latinx, Indigenous and African American workers were substantially below the average for all workers.

#### *2019 average monthly earnings by race/ethnicity of job holder*

Race/ethnicity	Number of jobs	Average monthly wage	Percent of total
All workers	1,634	\$3,450	101%
White Non-Latinx	1,634	\$3,450	101%
African American	24	\$2,935	86%
Indigenous	28	\$2,350	69%
Asian American	29	\$5,181	152%
Pacific Islander	4	\$4,332	127%
2 or more races	41	\$3,306	97%
Latinx	146	\$2,897	85%

Includes all non-federal “full-quarter” jobs covered by unemployment insurance. “Full-quarter” jobs are jobs held by the employee at an employer in the current quarter that existed in the previous quarter and persisted into the next quarter.

#### *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 2019, county per capita income was \$47,461. That was 27 percent below the state average, and 16 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state has closed by about 5 percentage points since 2000, while the gap with the nation has closed by 10 percent. Most of the difference was in earned income, which on a per capita basis was \$9,000 lower than the nation and \$15,000 below the state. Transfer payments were close to the national average, and higher than the state, primarily due to Social Security payments to Skamania’s older-than-average population.

#### *2019 Skamania County per capita income*

Per capita transfer payments	U.S.	Washington state	Skamania County
Total	\$9,521	\$8,962	\$9,617
Social Security benefits	\$3,140	\$3,102	\$3,690
Medicare benefits	\$2,388	\$1,929	\$2,272
Public assistance medical care benefits	\$1,909	\$1,768	\$1,772
Income maintenance benefits	\$819	\$630	\$614
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits	\$176	\$138	\$120
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$167	\$159	\$151
Unemployment insurance compensation	\$86	\$145	\$126
Veterans' benefits	\$399	\$478	\$373
All Other	\$439	\$613	\$500

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

## Population

Skamania's population was estimated at 12,060 in 2019. The increase of 170 residents over 2018 came primarily through net in-migration. Over the past decade, population has grown by 0.8 percent per year, just above the national rate.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Washington Office of Financial Management

### *Population facts*

	Skamania County	Washington state
Population 2020	12,060	7,545,478
Population 2000	9,872	5,894,121
Percent change, 2000 to 2020	22.2%	28.0%

### *Age, gender and ethnicity*

Skamania's population is somewhat older than the state and nation. In 2019:

- Those below the age of 20 in Skamania County made up 21 percent versus 25 percent statewide.
- Those aged 20 to 39 made up 20 percent in the county versus 27 percent statewide.
- People aged 40 to 59 was at 28 percent, which is above the state figure of 25 percent.
- The population aged 60 or older made up 32 percent, which topped the state average of 23 percent.

The county is also less diverse: in 2019, 12 percent of the population were people of color, much less than the statewide rate of 32 percent.

### *Demographics*

Population by age, 2019	Skamania County	Washington state
Under 5 years old	4.4%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	19.1%	22.3%
65 years and older	22.5%	16.3%

### *Educational attainment*

According to the 2015 to 2019 American Community Survey, Skamania had close to the national average of residents with post-baccalaureate degrees (9.8 percent vs. 12.4 percent). The county had relatively fewer residents with just a bachelor's (13.9 percent vs. 19.8 percent), and more with some college but no degree (27.3 percent vs. 20.4 percent).

Over the past two decades, the percent of county residents with a bachelor's degree or higher has increased substantially, from 17 percent to 24 percent, while the percent who lacked a high school diploma has dropped to 9 percent, below the national average of 12 percent.

Source: American Community Survey

### **Useful links**

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Skamania County information on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Skamania County information on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Skamania County History](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Skamania County](#)
- [City of Stevenson](#)
- [City of North Bonneville](#)
- [South Central Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [WorkSource Office Directory](#)
- [Skamania County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Skamania County homepage](#)

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