

Skamania County profile



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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 Chilluckitquew 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 Chilluckitquew, 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 in 2017 did not help. A residential treatment center that was supposed to open in its stead never materialized.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Skamania’s tourism-based economy hard. Employment dropped by 19 percent in the first three months of the recession, and there was little recovery in 2020. Hiring picked up in early 2021 and again in early 2022, and as this goes to press, May 2022 employment was within 60 jobs (2.3 percent) of pre-COVID-19 levels.

The transition from timber to tourism over the past few decades 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 2020, 74 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, 2020 (square miles)	1,658.3	24
People per square mile, 2020	6.7	35

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Outlook

Skamania County will likely see slow but steady employment growth over the next few years, as tourism fully recovers. Manufacturing employment has increased steadily over the past eight years, and that should continue going forward.

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 5,508 in 2021, with an unemployment rate of 6.4 percent. Joblessness will likely be lower in 2022—a big improvement from the 15.7 percent pandemic peak in April 2020.

A majority of employed county residents work in another county. In the 2016 to 2020 period, 47 percent worked in Skamania, 29 percent worked in another Washington county (mostly Clark and Klickitat), and 24 percent worked outside the state (mostly in the Portland Metro area and in Hood River County in Oregon). About one out of 6 jobs in the county were filled by commuters from other counties.

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division

Industry employment

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

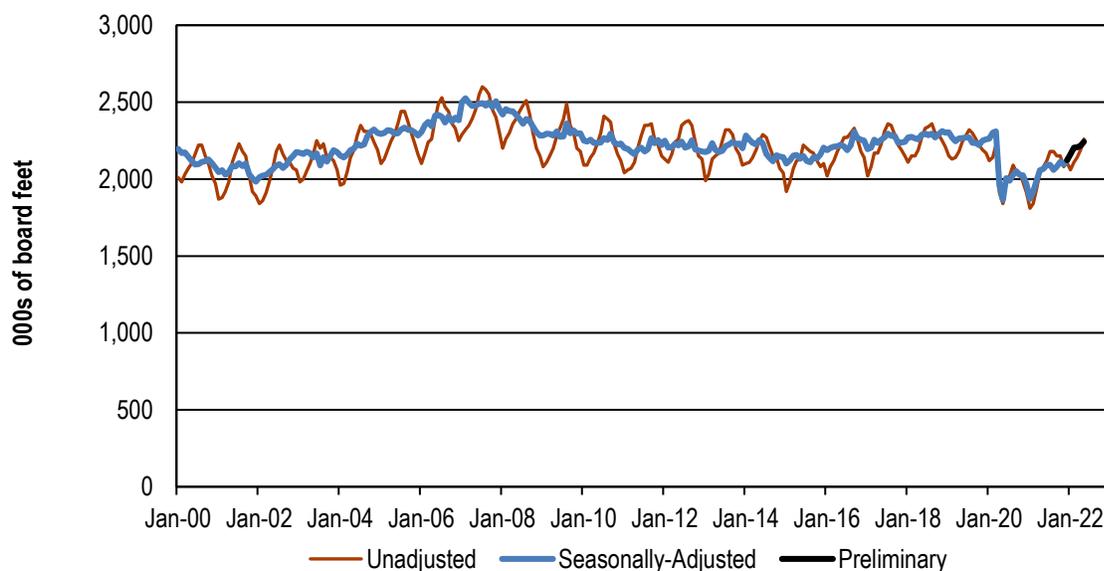
Skamania County nonfarm employment grew steadily from 2002 to 2007, dropped sharply in 2008 to 2011, and has vacillated around 2,200 jobs since then. The county added 50 jobs in 2018, before losing 30 jobs in 2019. Over the 2002 to 2019 period, despite the ups and downs, private sector growth trended 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.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, impacting employment beginning in April 2020. Employment dropped by 19 percent in the first three months of the recession, with accommodation and food services losing over 400 jobs. A sustained recovery didn't begin until early in 2021. Preliminary data through May 2022 showed the county still down 60 jobs (-2.3 percent) of pre-COVID-19 levels, with most of the gap in accommodations and food services.

In 2021, of the 2,060 jobs in the county, 31 percent (630) were in the public sector, a much higher proportion than for the state and nation. Leisure and hospitality (420 – 20 percent) and manufacturing (320 – 16 percent) dominated private sector employment.

Skamania County nonfarm employment, January 2000 to May 2022



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 or fewer since 2008.
- 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.

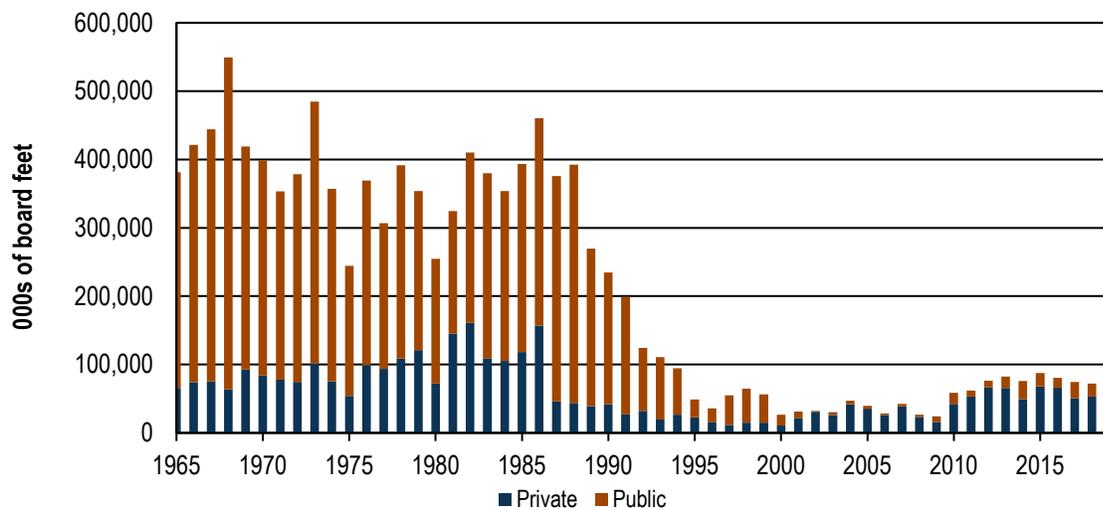
- The Bonneville Hot Springs Resort opened in North Bonneville in 2002 and then closed in early 2017. The planned reopening of the facility as an inpatient treatment center has not materialized.
- The brewing and winemaking industries emerged as a major employer.
- COVID-19 led to a sharp downturn in 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. Recent timber harvests are well below historical levels, and well below the allowable harvest on federal land.¹

Source: Employment Security Department/DATA Division

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.

¹ According to the Department of Natural Resources, historical timber harvest data has quality issues, but the overall trend is still valid.

Skamania County highlights:

- Females held a majority (52 percent) of the non-federal jobs in Skamania County in 2020.
- Female-dominated industries included education (77 percent), accommodation and food services (58 percent) and retail trade (61 percent).
- Male dominated industries include manufacturing (72 percent) and construction (76 percent).
- Older workers (aged 55+) made up 27 percent of job holders in the county, higher than the 23 percent statewide.
- Females working in the county earned an average of \$3,015 a month, 34 percent less than the average for male workers (\$4,535).

Industry employment by race/ethnicity

The following table 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 agriculture. A fourth 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, 2020

NAICS	Total*	White Non Latino	African American	Native American	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Two or more races	Latino
Total	1,939	1,646	26	42	30	5	52	167
11	44	23	1	0	0	0	0	18
21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
22	35	32	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	99	84	1	0	2	0	0	11
31-33	283	223	3	6	1	0	7	47
42	46	42	0	0	0	0	0	0
44-45	144	123	3	7	0	0	2	10
48-49	15	10	0	0	0	0	0	3
51	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
52	9	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
53	142	119	2	5	0	0	6	12
54	34	32	0	0	0	0	0	0
55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
56	18	15	0	0	0	0	0	1
61	217	198	0	4	0	0	7	7
62	146	118	6	4	6	0	3	10
71	18	17	0	0	0	0	0	0
72	434	378	4	11	5	0	16	25
81	45	38	0	0	0	0	0	3
Govt. Admin.	188	171	0	0	0	0	5	9

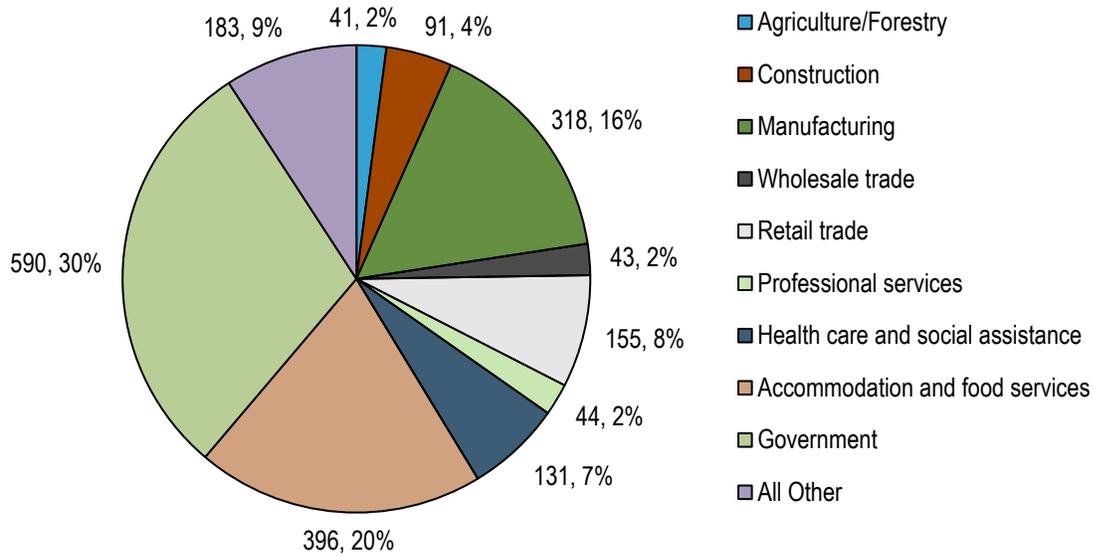
* Includes all non-federal jobs covered by unemployment insurance; some government jobs (e.g., education) are shown under their NAICS (e.g., NAICS 61). Some data was suppressed, so lines and columns might not add to the total.

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics Database

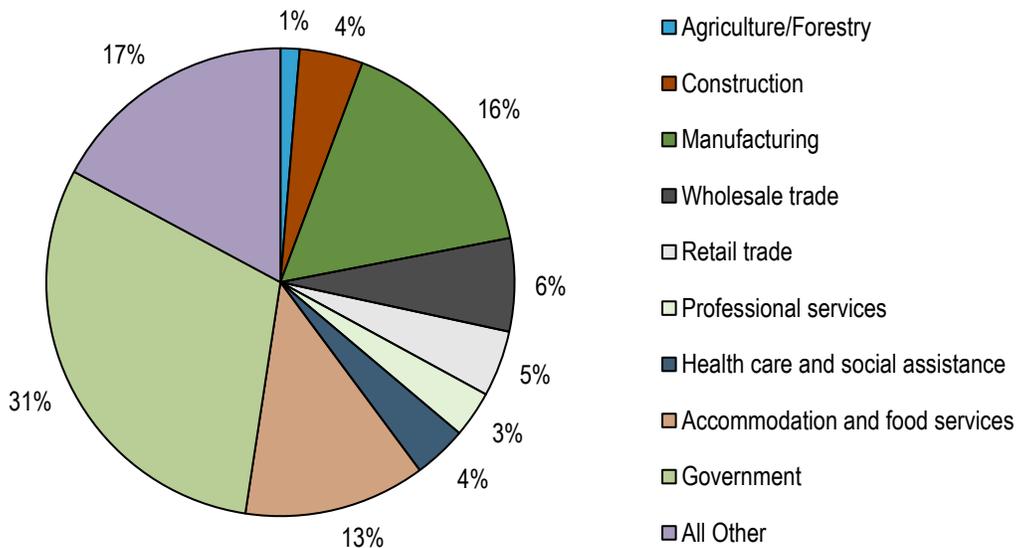
Wages and income

The charts below contrast industry shares of employment and wages covered by unemployment insurance in the county. The wage shares of wholesale trade, professional services and government were above their employment shares, while wage shares for 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 \$46,763. The county's average wage trended upward very slowly over the past 20 years after factoring out inflation, but over the past three years it has jumped by 22 percent.

Covered employment in 2021



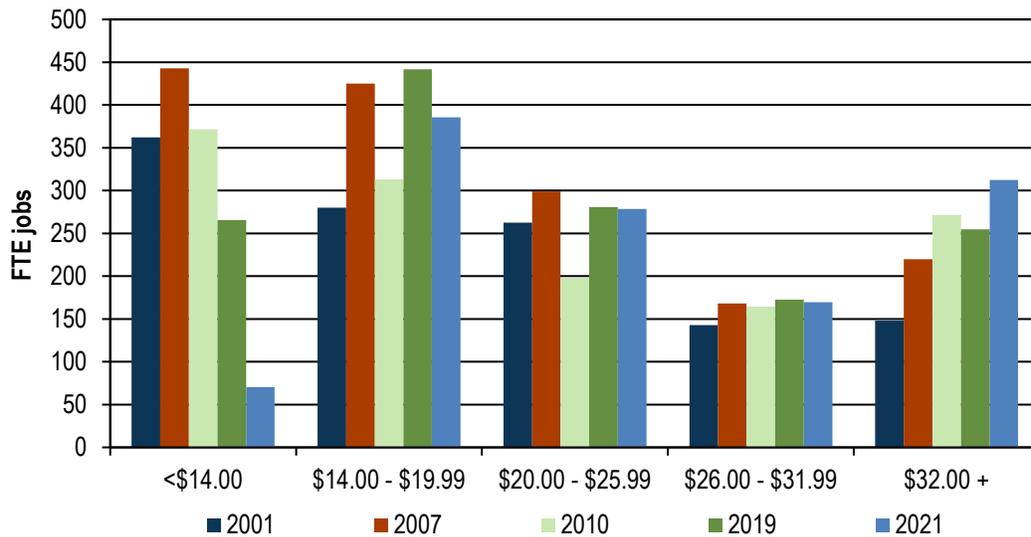
Covered wages in 2021



The median hourly wage for non-federal jobs in Skamania County was \$23.23 in 2021. The median rose by 9 percent in 2020, in part due to the loss of lower-wage jobs in the recession. The median declined slightly in 2021, as the recovery brought back jobs in accommodations and food services, but was still more than 7 percent above the 2019 median after adjustment for inflation. The county was still more than \$2.00 per hour below the state median if King County were excluded.

Skamania has generally seen a positive shift in wages over the years. In 2001, 30 percent of jobs located in the county paid below \$14.00 (adjusted for inflation) – that was down to 6 percent in 2021, as the minimum wage increased. There were more moderate-wage jobs (\$12.00 per hour to \$25.99 per hour) and more upper-wage jobs (\$32.00 per hour and up) in 2021 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 following table shows the average monthly wage for jobs in Skamania County by the race or ethnicity of the job holder. Wages for Indigenous and African American workers were substantially below the average for all workers.

2020 average monthly earnings by race/ethnicity of job holder

Race/ethnicity	Number of jobs	Average monthly wage	Percent of total
All workers	1,617	\$3,753	100%
White Non-Latino	1,374	\$3,777	101%
African American	23	\$2,494	66%
Indigenous	32	\$2,582	69%
Asian American	27	\$5,767	154%
Pacific Islander	3	\$3,277	87%
Two or more races	44	\$3,982	106%
Latino	137	\$3,456	92%

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 2020, county per capita income was \$49,519. That was 26 percent below the state average, and 17 percent below the national average. The gap between the county and the state has closed by 5 percentage points since 2000, while the gap with the nation has closed by 9 percent. Most of the difference was in earned income, which on a per capita basis was about \$9,000 lower than the nation and \$15,000 below the state. Per capita transfer payments were below the national average, and a bit higher than the state, with higher than average Social Security payments to Skamania's older-than-average population and lower Medicaid, income maintenance and unemployment insurance compensation.

2020 Skamania County per capita transfer payment

Per capita transfer payments	U.S.	Washington state	Skamania County
Total	\$12,872	\$12,112	\$12,412
Social Security benefits	\$3,272	\$3,231	\$3,877
Medicare benefits	\$2,486	\$2,008	\$2,389
Public assistance medical care benefits	\$2,035	\$1,814	\$1,831
Income maintenance benefits	\$918	\$771	\$765
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits	\$176	\$137	\$121
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$254	\$226	\$217
Other income maintenance	\$488	\$408	\$427
Unemployment insurance compensation	\$1,630	\$1,599	\$1,211
Veterans' benefits	\$442	\$526	\$430
Refundable tax credits (e.g., stimulus payments)	\$1,307	\$1,100	\$1,101
All Other	\$783	\$1,062	\$807

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 11,900 in 2022. The increase of 300 residents since the 2020 Census came primarily through net in-migration. Over the past decade, population has grown by 0.6 percent per year, equaling the national rate.

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

Population facts

	Skamania County	Washington state
Population 2010	11,066	6,724,540
Population 2020	11,604	7,707,047
Population 2022	11,900	7,864,000
Percent change, 2010 to 2022	7.5%	17.0%

Age, race and ethnicity

Skamania's population is somewhat older than the state and nation. In 2021:

- Those below the age of 20 in Skamania County made up 21 percent versus 24 percent statewide.
- Those aged 20 to 39 made up 20 percent in the county versus 28 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 30 percent, which was well above the state average of 24 percent.

The county is also less diverse than the state: in 2021, 15 percent of the population were people of color, much less than the statewide rate of 36 percent.

Demographics

Population by age, 2021	Skamania County	Washington state
Under 20 years old	21.3%	24.1%
20 to 39 years old	20.2%	27.5%
40 to 59 years old	28.2%	24.8%
60 years and older	30.3%	23.6%
Population by race/ethnicity, 2021		
White, non-Hispanic	84.6%	63.7%
Black, any ethnicity	0.3%	4.3%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, any ethnicity	1.5%	1.9%
Asian, any ethnicity	1.0%	9.9%
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander, any ethnicity	0.2%	0.9%
Two or more races, any ethnicity	8.2%	10.2%
Latino, any race	6.8%	14.0%

Educational attainment

According to the 2016 to 2020 American Community Survey, Skamania had close to the national average of residents with post-baccalaureate degrees (10 percent versus 12 percent). The county had relatively fewer residents with just a bachelor's (16 percent versus 21 percent), and more with some college but no degree (26 percent versus 20 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 26 percent, while the percent who lacked a high school diploma has dropped to 8 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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