

# Northwest Washington Labor Market Review

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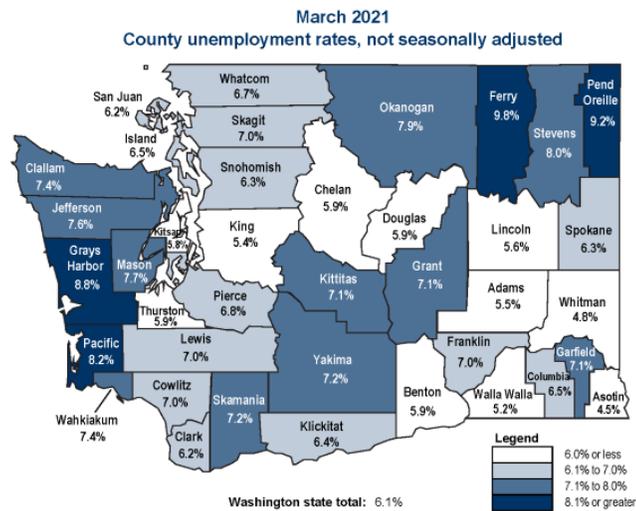
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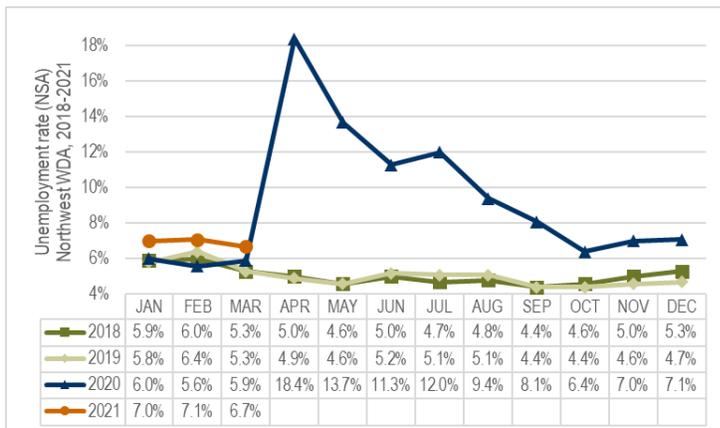
For all intents and purposes, this is the thirteenth report to record the effects of the Covid-19 economic situation in Washington state, and the twelfth for Northwest Washington.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, preliminary estimates from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate nonfarm employment in Washington rose by 23,100 in March 2021.<sup>1</sup> BLS estimates the private sector gained 18,600 jobs during the month and the public sector gained 4,500 jobs.

On a not seasonally adjusted basis, estimates for March 2020 through March 2021 indicate a decrease in employment of 166,400 for the state. The private sector lost 121,200 jobs while the public sector lost an estimated 45,200 jobs over the year.



Washington’s preliminary seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for March 2021 is 5.4 percent. The revised estimated February 2021 unemployment rate is at 5.6 percent. The March 2020 unemployment rate was 5.3 percent.



BLS estimates of monthly job gains and losses are based on a survey of businesses. Preliminary estimates are subject to revision. The February 2021 preliminary estimated gain of 24,500 jobs was revised to a gain of 33,200 jobs.

# Whatcom County

## Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The unemployment rate in Whatcom County was 6.7 percent in March 2021 (preliminary), below the February estimate of 7.1 percent (revised). For comparison, the unemployment rate 12 months ago was 5.9 percent. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the highest observed unemployment rate for Whatcom County was 18.4 percent in April 2020.

- Over the course of the pandemic, the size of the labor force has dropped, as many people are no longer employed and are not actively seeking employment. Compared to March 2020, the labor force dropped by 6,826 or 5.8 percent. Within that estimate, the number of employed workers dropped by 7,259 (6.5 percent) and the number of unemployed workers expanded by 433 (6.2 percent). Whatcom County's estimated labor force was 111,150 in March.

## Whatcom County local area payroll jobs

Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Not Seasonally Adjusted  
**Bellingham Metropolitan Statistical Area (Whatcom County)**  
 Data benchmarked through September 2020

NAICS Industry Title	Prelim Mar-21	Revised Feb-21	Revised Mar-20	Change		
				Feb-21 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21
Total Nonfarm	90,300	89,200	96,600	1,100	-6,300	-6.5%
Total Private	72,800	71,700	77,400	1,100	-4,600	-5.9%
Goods Producing	17,600	17,500	18,600	100	-1,000	-5.4%
Mining, Logging, and Construction	8,300	8,000	8,100	300	200	2.5%
Manufacturing	9,300	9,500	10,500	-200	-1,200	-11.4%
Service Providing	72,700	71,700	78,000	1,000	-5,300	-6.8%
Private Services Providing	55,200	54,200	58,800	1,000	-3,600	-6.1%
Trade, Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	15,900	15,700	16,300	200	-400	-2.5%
Retail Trade	10,700	10,500	11,100	200	-400	-3.6%
Financial Activities	4,300	4,300	4,000	0	300	7.5%
Professional and Business Services	8,100	8,000	8,500	100	-400	-4.7%
Leisure and Hospitality	8,100	7,600	10,700	500	-2,600	-24.3%
Government	17,500	17,500	19,200	0	-1,700	-8.9%
Federal Government	1,400	1,500	1,400	-100	0	0.0%
Total State Government	6,200	6,400	7,000	-200	-800	-11.4%
Total Local Government	9,900	9,600	10,800	300	-900	-8.3%

Total nonfarm payroll in Whatcom County (not seasonally adjusted) increased by 1,100 from February to March 2021. Year-over-year, the tally of nonfarm jobs decreased by 6,300 (down 6.5 percent).

- In March, most industries covered in this report added jobs. The largest one-month gains were observed in leisure and hospitality (+500). Manufacturing was down (-100) over the month.

- Most major industries detailed in this report shed jobs over the year. The largest decreases came from leisure and hospitality (-2,600) and government (-1,700). Employment in construction and financial activities each expanded over the year.

## Skagit County

### Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The unemployment rate in Skagit County was 7.0 percent in March 2021 (preliminary); this is down from 7.6 percent in February (revised). The unemployment rate 12 months ago was 6.2 percent. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Skagit County unemployment rate reached a peak of 19.6 percent in April 2020.

- Compared to March 2020, the number of people counted as ‘employed’ decreased by 3,246 (5.5 percent) and the number of people counted as ‘unemployed’ expanded by 351 (9.0 percent). Skagit County’s resident labor force was estimated at 60,035 decreasing by 4.6 percent over the year.

### Skagit County local area payroll jobs

Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Not Seasonally Adjusted  
Mount Vernon-Anacortes Metropolitan Statistical Area (Skagit County)

Data benchmarked through September 2020

NAICS Industry Title	Prelim Mar-21	Revised Feb-21	Revised Mar-20	Change		
				Feb-21 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21
Total Nonfarm	48,700	47,700	51,700	1,000	-3,000	-5.8%
Total Private	37,800	37,100	39,600	700	-1,800	-4.5%
Goods Producing	10,200	10,000	10,900	200	-700	-6.4%
Mining, Logging, and Construction	4,100	3,900	4,500	200	-400	-8.9%
Manufacturing	6,100	6,100	6,400	0	-300	-4.7%
Service Providing	38,500	37,700	40,800	800	-2,300	-5.6%
Private Services Providing	27,600	27,100	28,700	500	-1,100	-3.8%
Trade, Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	9,900	9,900	9,800	0	100	1.0%
Retail Trade	6,700	6,700	7,100	0	-400	-5.6%
Leisure and Hospitality	4,100	3,800	4,900	300	-800	-16.3%
Government	10,900	10,600	12,100	300	-1,200	-9.9%
Federal Government	400	300	400	100	0	0.0%
State Government	1,200	1,200	1,400	0	-200	-14.3%
Local Government	9,300	9,100	10,300	200	-1,000	-9.7%

Total nonfarm employment in Skagit County increased by 1,000 from February to March 2021. Year-over-year, the tally of nonfarm jobs contracted by 3,000 or 5.8 percent.

- Over the month, all industries included in this report added jobs or maintained employment levels. The largest increases were observed in leisure and hospitality and government (300

each), reflecting a relaxation of rules for dining out and the shift from online to hybrid learning at local schools.

- Covid-19 related losses reverberated throughout the economy, showing up in the year over year estimates for most industries. The deepest losses reported on a yearly basis were observed in government and leisure and hospitality. Only one sector - transportation, warehousing and utilities – posted employment gains over the year.

## Island County

### Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The unemployment rate in Island County was 6.5 percent (preliminary) in March 2021, unchanged from the (revised) unemployment reported in February. The unemployment rate 12 months ago was 5.7 percent. The highest observed unemployment rate was 16.3 percent in April 2020.

- Compared to March 2020, the number of people counted as ‘employed’ decreased by 1,818 (5.3 percent) and the number of people counted as ‘unemployed’ or actively seeking work expanded by 199 (9.6 percent). Island County’s civilian labor force was estimated as 34,975 in March 2021 – 4.4 percent below last year.

### Island County local area payroll jobs

Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Not Seasonally Adjusted

**Oak Harbor Micropolitan Statistical Area (Island County)**

Data benchmarked through September 2020

NAICS Industry Title	Prelim Mar-21	Revised Feb-21	Revised Mar-20	Change		
				Feb-21 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21
Total Nonfarm	16,700	16,610	17,360	90	-660	-3.8%
Total Private	12,240	12,230	12,520	10	-280	-2.2%
Goods Producing	1,940	1,980	1,980	-40	-40	-2.0%
Mining, Logging, and Construction	1,210	1,250	1,150	-40	60	5.2%
Manufacturing	730	730	830	0	-100	-12.0%
Service Providing	14,760	14,630	15,380	130	-620	-4.0%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	2,650	2,660	2,620	-10	30	1.1%
Retail Trade	2,080	2,090	2,040	-10	40	2.0%
Information and Financial Activities	850	850	840	0	10	1.2%
Professional and Business Services	1,490	1,490	1,420	0	70	4.9%
Education and Health Services	2,320	2,310	2,410	10	-90	-3.7%
Leisure and Hospitality	2,090	2,040	2,350	50	-260	-11.1%
Government	4,460	4,380	4,840	80	-380	-7.9%
Federal Government	1,280	1,280	1,340	0	-60	-4.5%
State and Local Government	3,180	3,100	3,500	80	-320	-9.1%
State and Local Government Education	1,360	1,290	1,610	70	-250	-15.5%

Total nonfarm payroll jobs in Island County expanded by 90 from February to March 2021. Year-over-year, the tally of nonfarm jobs contracted by 660 or 3.8 percent.

- From February to March, two major industries included in this report saw declining employment levels, with the deepest drops observed in construction. Three industries added jobs, with the largest increases attributable to government as public schools transitioned from online to hybrid learning models.
- Year-over-year, the deepest losses were observed in government and leisure and hospitality. Construction, trade transportation and utilities (including retail), and professional and business services and information and financial activities each added jobs over the year.

*Employment statistics for Island County do not include military employment.*

## San Juan County

### Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The unemployment rate in San Juan County was 6.2 percent in March 2021 (preliminary), unchanged from February (revised). For comparison, the unemployment rate 12 months ago was 5.3 percent. The peak unemployment rate reported during the pandemic was 18.7 percent in April.

- Compared to March 2020, the number of residents counted as ‘employed’ increased by 57 and the number counted as ‘unemployed’ or actively seeking work increased by 89. Altogether, the San Juan County labor force consisted of an estimated 8,209 resident workers and expanded by 1.8 percent over the year.

### San Juan County local area payroll jobs

Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Not Seasonally Adjusted

#### San Juan County

Data benchmarked through September 2020

NAICS Industry Title	Prelim Mar-21	Revised Feb-21	Revised Mar-20	Change		
				Feb-21 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21	Mar-20 Mar-21
Total Nonfarm	5,550	5,520	5,370	30	180	3.4%
Total Private	4,780	4,730	4,550	50	230	5.1%
Goods Producing	1,040	1,030	900	10	140	15.6%
Mining, Logging, and Construction	780	770	700	10	80	11.4%
Manufacturing	260	260	200	0	60	30.0%
Service Providing	4,510	4,490	4,470	20	40	0.9%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	1,000	990	960	10	40	4.2%
Information and Financial Activities	380	380	340	0	40	11.8%
Professional and Business Services	480	490	420	-10	60	14.3%
Education and Health Services	540	540	640	0	-100	-15.6%
Leisure and Hospitality	1,150	1,120	1,080	30	70	6.5%
Government	770	790	820	-20	-50	-6.1%

Net nonfarm payroll in San Juan County expanded over the month (+30). Year-over-year, total nonfarm employment was up 180 or 3.4 percent.

- From February to March, most industries detailed in this report expanded employment. The largest increases were evident in the county’s largest set of industries – 30 jobs were added in leisure and hospitality. Expanded employment is consistent with both the season and relaxation of restrictions on indoor dining in recent weeks.
- According to preliminary estimates, all industries except government and education and health services expanded employment over the year. *(Note: I expect to see revisions in the next release. AVS)*

## Weekly Unemployment Insurance Claims information:

In March 2020, the Employment Security Department began publishing weekly counts of initial claims for Unemployment Insurance. Initial claims provide an indicator of layoffs. Because they are entered weekly, they are a bit more nimble than our survey-based datasets.



New claims for unemployment insurance have stabilized, but are still higher than pre-pandemic levels.

*\*Labor force and payroll reporting reflects employment during 2021 the week of March 7-13.*

## Forecast information for Washington state:

The Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council issues quarterly forecasts that address Washington’s projected economic health. The most recent forecast was issued in March. Forecast information is available at [www.erfc.wa.gov](http://www.erfc.wa.gov).

*The Employment Security Department is an equal-opportunity employer and provider of programs and services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to people with disabilities. Washington Relay Service 711.*