

# Population Demographics of Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

A brief set of facts compiled by  
NSA County Planning Departments  
to inform Gorge 2020

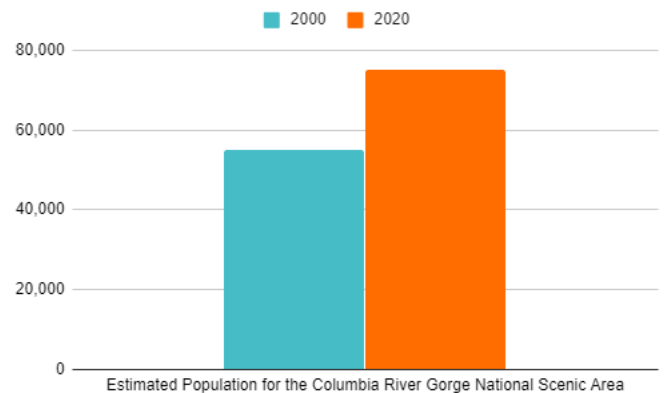
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# Demographics

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area consists of portions of five counties along the Columbia River in the Oregon and Washington State. This includes thirteen urban areas that make up 10% of the total National Scenic Area.

## POPULATION OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

The population of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area region is roughly 75,000.<sup>i</sup> The region has seen continual growth in the last decade with projections for continued growth into the next decade, driven by emerging industry clusters, quality of life, and pressures from growth in nearby metropolitan areas. As the chart on the right indicates, between 2000 and 2020, there was a roughly 36% increase in total population for the region.



Estimates suggest that the state of Oregon should anticipate an additional million people by 2040. Based on the individual estimates and projections for each of the six National Scenic Area counties, there will be significant population increases both in and out of incorporated areas over the next twenty to twenty five years.

### Wasco County

According to the PSU Population Research Center, in 2020 Wasco County had a population of 26,483, with 16,148 within The Dalles UGB and 464 people within the Mosier UGB. Additional areas within the National Scenic Area account for roughly an additional 2,750 people, or 31% of the total 8,770 people living in unincorporated Wasco County. That number is projected by the PSU Population Resource Center to increase by roughly 4.5% over the next twenty years.

The Dalles saw a 13.4% increase in population from 2000 to 2017<sup>ii</sup> with an added 787 households. The Latinx community increased between 2000 and 2010 from 10.5% of the population to 17%.<sup>iii</sup>

### Hood River County

In 2020, Hood River County had a population of 24,406 with 11,501 living in incorporated cities of Hood River and Cascade Locks<sup>iv</sup>. The population of Hood River County is projected to increase by roughly 16% over the next twenty years, with steady net in-migration and a continued demand for housing<sup>v</sup>. Roughly 2,000 new people are anticipated for areas in Hood River County outside the UGBs by 2045<sup>vi</sup>.

The City of Hood River is expected to add an additional 3,800 people by 2045<sup>vii</sup>.

## Multnomah County

US Census estimates have Multnomah County's population at 812,855 in 2019 with a 10.6% growth rate since 2010<sup>viii</sup>. Projections have the growth rate slowing, but still increasing overall population size<sup>ix</sup>. Growth rates for Multnomah County are projected to stay positive through 2050<sup>x</sup>, with notable increases in people 60 and over.

## Skamania County

Skamania County's population was estimated in 2019 to be 12,083, a 9.2% increase from 2010<sup>xi</sup>. The projected population growth over the next twenty years is for an additional 2,596 people<sup>xii</sup>.

## Klickitat County

In 2019, Klickitat County had a population of 22,425 people, with an increase of 10.4% since 2010<sup>xiii</sup>. Roughly two thirds of people in Klickitat County live in unincorporated areas<sup>xiv</sup>.

## Clark County

Since 2007, Clark County's population is increasing annually at a rate of 1.13%<sup>xv</sup>. The rate in Washougal, adjacent to the National Scenic Area boundaries, is higher at 1.84% per annum. Clark County, according to 2019 estimates, had a population of 488,241<sup>xvi</sup> with a 14.8% increase in population from 2010. According to recent analysis, Vancouver is the state's second fastest-growing city and Clark County is the fourth fastest growing County<sup>xvii</sup>. Clark County has predicted future growth of an additional 13,000 people by 2035<sup>xviii</sup>.

## Rates of Growth

In addition to projected population growth, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is expected to continue growth in economic sectors, housing units, and visitors. This growth has an impact on land use and land use management, infrastructure, public facilities and services, and resource protections.

## Housing Issues

To address housing issues, the State of Oregon identified cities where households spent more than 50 of income on rent. In 2019, The Dalles had 29.4% of the population as severely rent burdened<sup>xix</sup>. Similarly, the City of Hood River's recent Housing Needs Analysis demonstrated that Hood River has a deficit of more than 200 affordable dwelling units.<sup>xx</sup> Rent burdened households are more likely than others to sacrifice necessities like healthy food and health care to pay the rent and experience unstable housing situations.<sup>xxi</sup> Other regional statistics demonstrate this link; a 2019 assessment found 12% of people in Wasco County suffer with food insecurity and 11% have no health insurance.<sup>xxii</sup>

In a survey completed with Oregon Kitchen Table in 2017 for Hood River, 82% of respondents expressed the belief that housing is a serious problem in Hood River County, with over 55% indicating it was “very serious.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

Housing issues are not exclusive to renters. Analysis for Hood River’s Housing Needs Analysis found housing sales prices increased by 37% between 2014 and 2019 and approximately 26% of homeowners are cost burdened.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Recent research suggests that the Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro Metropolitan Statistical Area ranks second behind Seattle-Bellevue for high housing costs<sup>xxv</sup>. Skamania and Klickitat counties also shows cost-burdened renter households and homeowner households, with forecasted gaps in affordable housing<sup>xxvi</sup>.

With projected increases in population across all Columbia River Gorge counties, housing demand will continue to rise and impact availability and affordability. While some of the urban areas can accommodate limited growth, it’s likely the needs and demands will outpace urban land supply.

### *Economic Development Impacts*

Wasco and Hood River Counties account for 90% of the population and 92% of the Columbia River Gorge five county region employment (Census 2010). In 2010, 22.76% of the economic activity in the region was related to natural resources and mining, well above the 5.32% for Oregon<sup>xxvii</sup>. This clearly indicates that the vast amount of economic activity in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area takes place on the working rural landscapes, outside of urban areas.

Between 2002 and 2012, the region saw 18% job growth<sup>xxviii</sup> with increases in a variety of industry sectors including renewable energy, healthcare, fermentation science, tourism, and STEM<sup>xxix</sup>. By 2014, the largest full time, non-seasonal employers in Wasco County were the Mid-Columbia Medical Center, the State of Oregon, Oregon Cherry Growers, and Fred Meyer<sup>xxx</sup>. Skamania County is predominantly a tourist economy, with slight increases recently in forestry reflecting growth in the natural resources sector<sup>xxxi</sup>. By contrast, Klickitat County has seen major expansion of agriculture activity throughout the County<sup>xxxii</sup>.

In the National Scenic area, there are approximately 130,000 acres of prime farmlands<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Mid-Columbia Economic Development District has identified that the greatest opportunity for growth in resource industries is in increased value-added manufacturing and agri-tourism<sup>xxxiv</sup>.

Much of the tourism activities and agriculture work take place outside the urban areas, on public and private lands that are supported by services, retail, and other industries within nearby towns.

### *Seasonal and Tourism Impacts*

In 2009, National Geographic Traveler ranked the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) #6 on its international iconic destination list. The United States Forest Service (USFS) estimates that approximately 2 million people visit the CRGNSA per year.<sup>xxxv</sup> Visitors come not only to recreate and for scenic opportunities, but also to engage in working landscapes with agricultural products or visit heritage sites.

Skamania County, with 94% of its lands under Federal ownership, is a destination for recreation and tourism activities, and the urban areas servicing many of the visitors for nearby attractions. Tourism is Skamania County's number one employer.

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