

WASHINGTON MY HOME KITTITAS COUNTY – 2015

Kittitas County is located in Central Washington. As of the 2010 census, the population was 40,915. Its county seat and largest city is Ellensburg.

Kittitas County was originally part of Yakima County. It was partitioned and officially separated in 1884. Its name comes from the Native Americans that lived in the area in the 19th Century, whom were known as the Kittitas or Upper Yakima Indians. The tribes hunted, fished, dug the Camas root and ate wild berries as food. The western settlers moved the tribes back onto the Yakima Nation Indian Reservation.

According to the US Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 2,333 square miles (6,040 km²), of which 2,298 square miles (5,950 km²) is land and 36 square miles (93 km²) (1.5%) is water. The highest point in the county is Mount Daniel at 7,959 feet (2,426 m) above sea level. The lowest point in the county is along the Columbia River in the southeast portion of the county at approximately 600 feet above sea level.

Geographic features include the Cascade Mountains, Yakima River, Manastash Ridge, and the Wenatchee Mountains. Major highways of the county are I-90, I-82, and US 97. Kittitas County includes the cities of Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Kittitas, Roslyn, and South Cle Elum. Other census-designated places are Easton, Ronald, Snoqualmie Pass, Thorp, and Vantage. The communities of Bristol, Doris, Liberty, Rocklyn, Suncadia, Teanaway, and Thrail are scattered throughout the county.

The county has three large lakes, Cle Elum, Kachess, and Keechelus. All three lakes are dammed for flood control. The Cle Elum River's headwaters are from Lake Cle Elum. It flows into the Yakima River, which is the outflow for Lake Keechelus. The eastern portion of the county is much drier with grassland and sage brush.

INDUSTRY: Cattle ranching, logging, farming, railroad and mining were all early industries in the county. In the early 1880s, coal and other minerals were discovered in the Cle Elum River Valley and surrounding mountains. By 1886, the Northern Pacific Company built a railroad line between Cle Elum and Roslyn and coal shipments were expedited. Coal production peaked in the 1920s but then waned in the 1930s due to competition from oil. Gold, silver, copper, chromium, lead, iron, mercury, manganese, molybdenum, nickel and antimony were also mined in the area during this time.

Today the county's largest employers are Central Washington University, the county, Ellensburg School District, the city of Ellensburg, and Kittitas Valley Community Hospital.

FLORA AND FAUNA: There are a variety of species represented within Kittitas County. These include a diversity of grasses, herbs, trees, birds, mammals and amphibians. The genus of ricegrass known as *Oryzopsis* was one of the earliest grasses classified within the county. Among the amphibian species found are the Cascades frog and the Rough-skinned Newt, the latter being a common far western USA taxon; in fact, examples of neoteny have been found in individual newts of this species within the county.

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY: Central Washington University ("CWU") is one of the state's fastest growing universities. It presently has a total enrollment of nearly 11,000 students. CWU was established in 1891 in Ellensburg as Washington State Normal School to educate future elementary and junior high teachers. In 1937, the school's name changed to Central Washington College, then Central Washington State College in 1961, before finally settling on Central Washington University in 1977. CWU has a large,

attractive main campus located in the northeastern part of the city. CWU has grown to include branch campuses on the western side of the state in the cities of Edmonds, Des Moines, and one in Pierce County. CWU also has centers in Moses Lake, Wenatchee and Yakima.

CWU operates the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute, one of two of its kind in the world. The Institute was home to the chimpanzee Washoe from 1980 until 2007. Washoe is believed to be the first nonhuman to acquire human language ability. Washoe was able to communicate with people by using American Sign Language.

CWU's mascot is the "Wildcats" and the school colors are Crimson and Black. CWU participates in NCAA Division II athletics and is part of the Great Northwest Athletic Conference, except in football. In 1995, led by future National Football League Quarterback Jon Kitna, CWU won the NAIA Division II Football National Championship. The men's and women's swim teams have won a combined six National Championships. Unfortunately the school eliminated the swimming and wrestling programs in 2004 in a move to save money.

Famous CWU Alumni include Craig T. Nelson, an actor who starred in the sitcom Coach; Keith Gilbertson, an NCAA football coach; Ron Sims, the current Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and Roland "Sandy" Wheeler, inventor of the "Bowflex" exercise equipment in the 1980s who later went on to acquire Stairmaster, Schwinn Fitness and Nautilus.

For more information, go to [Central Washington University's website](#).

ELLENBURG RODEO AND THE KITTITAS COUNTY FAIR: Started in 1923, the Ellensburg Rodeo has grown from a local competition among ranch hands to a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Event featuring over 500 contestants with prize money in excess of \$300,000. The event takes place each Labor Day Weekend at the Ellensburg Rodeo Fairgrounds. The nation's best riders, ropers, and wrestlers compete in one of the country's best rodeo arenas. The weekend fun is heightened by the Kittitas County Fair, which coincides with the rodeo and occurs at the same location.

In addition to bull riding, bronco riding, and steer roping, the rodeo also features a parade, clowns, and the Miss Rodeo Washington Pageant. Also visit the "Trading Post Saloon" for beverages and live music. For the latest information and to purchase tickets for the rodeo, check the [Ellensburg Rodeo's website](#).

The first organized Kittitas County Fair occurred in 1885. Local farmers and ranchers showcased the fruits of their labors. The fair has grown into a five-day event held each Labor Day weekend. In 1923, the Kittitas County Fairgrounds were built on their current location, combining the Rodeo and County Fair into one big celebration. The Fair is also used as a gathering for the Yakima Indians. Get more information from the [Kittitas County Fair's website](#).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce
City of Ellensburg
Kittitas County
Wikipedia