

# Public Ports in Washington

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Island County - Council of Governments

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# Overview

## Port Districts – Introduction and History

## Port Powers – Overview

## Port Funding Sources

What ports do:

- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Industrial Development and Environmental Remediation

## Case Studies!





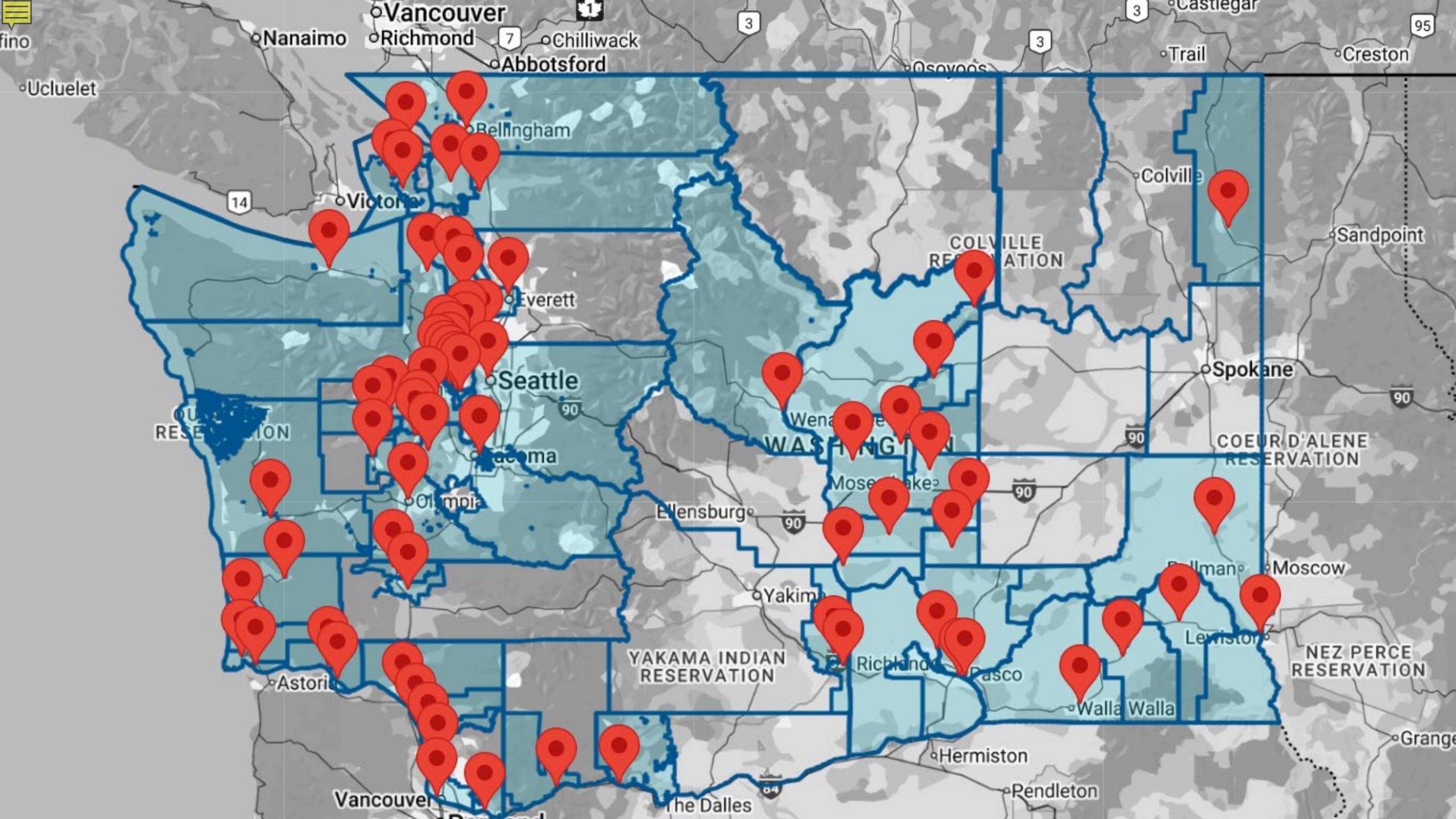
# Port Districts in Washington State

There are **75** port districts in Washington State

Ports are **special purpose districts and municipal corporations**

Ports were created to **retain public ownership** of waterfront and critical infrastructure

Ports **facilitate trade**, but the main purpose is to **promote economic development**



**1911** Seattle & Grays Harbor

**1912** Vancouver

**1913** Bremerton

**1915** Kennewick

**1917** Brownsville

**1918** Tacoma & Everett

**1919** Kingston



**1935** Camas-Washougal

**1940** Pasco & Ridgefield

**1941** Klickitat

**1948** Shelton

**1949** Edmonds

**1910s** **1920s** **1930s** **1940s** **1950s** **1960s** **1970s** **1980s** **1990s**

**1929** Tracyton

**1928** Ilwaco, Peninsula & Willapa Harbor

**1927** Dewatto

**1926** Anacortes & Mabana

**1925** Keyport, Tahuya

**1924** Port Townsend

**1923** Port Angeles, Manchester & Waterman

**1922** Olympia & Ilwhee

**1921** Allyn, Bellingham & Longview

**1920** Kalama & Silverdale

The **Port of Bellingham** first entered the ferry business in 1923 when it built a landing for the Canadian Pacific Railway's ferry, *Motor Princess*. The auto-ferry traveled between Sidney, B.C. and Bellingham in roughly three hours, each way. Today the port's Fairhaven Terminal accommodates passengers using the Alaska Ferry System and a privately-operated ferry operating between Bellingham and Victoria, B.C.

**1960** Grand Coulee & Coulee City

**1961** Woodland, South Whidbey & Kahlotus

**1964** Sunnyside, Skamania & Skagit County

**1965** Moses Lake & Ephrata

**1966** Othello, Wahkiakum County #2 & Warden

**1967** Coupeville

**1959** Orcas

**1958** Benton, Clarkston, Columbia, Garfield, Wahkiakum #1, Chelan County, Douglas, Mattawa, Royal Slope, Quincy & Whitman

**1954** Chinook

**1952** Walla Walla

**1951** Poulsbo & Hoodsport

**1950** Friday Harbor

**1978** Pend Oreille

**1990** Grapeview

**1988** Grandview

**1986** Centralia, Chehalis & Lopez



The **Port of Grays Harbor**, founded in 1911, is known for its log and lumber shipments. Here, the "billionth foot" is loaded aboard a Japanese ship in the 1920s.

## Washington Public Port District Formation

**1911 - 1990**

Published by the Washington Public Ports Association, 1997.





# Intro to WA Ports and WPPA

1911 – Port District Act enacted by WA Legislature

- Animating spirit: Public benefit from public resources
- Initial port district power: Development of transportation facilities
- Economic development officially added in 1985



WPPA Mission :

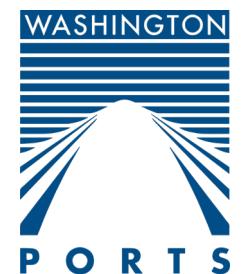
“Strengthen the Washington Port industry through Collaboration, Advocacy, Research, and Education.”

Engagement with our partners

Legislative: What can we advocate for together?

Educational: What can we learn from each other?

And more: What more can we do to strengthen the WA trade economy?



# More Port History

**1911- Washington State Legislature passes the Port District Act, authorizing the creation of port districts**

## **INITIAL POWERS:**

- “Port districts for the acquirement, construction, maintenance, operation, development, and regulation of a system of harbor improvements and rail and water transfer facilities...”
- Acquisition of property; construct/condemn/maintain “sea walls, jetties, piers, wharves...other harbor improvements.”
- Improvements for “industrial and commercial purposes”
- Authorized to collect taxes, issue bonds

**1911-1912 - Ports of Seattle, Grays Harbor, and Vancouver**

**1913-1941 - More big ports (Tacoma and Everett) and the Mosquito Fleet Ports emerge (i.e. Bremerton, Brownsville, Kingston); Kalama 1920; Longview 1921; Tri-Cities Ports (Kennewick, 1915; Pasco, 1940)**



# Port funding sources

## *Revenues!*

- Lease revenue is a major driver of port revenues around the state
- Buying and selling real estate is another revenue input

## *Bonds!*

- General obligation bonds (backed by tax levy);
- Revenue bonds (backed by revenue from a specific source)

## *Taxes*

- Founding statute: established a general port levy, funded by property taxes, now at 45 cents/\$1,000 assessed valuation
- Industrial development district (IDD) tax levy (45 cents/\$1,000 assessed valuation - two, 6-year periods of taxation, spent over 20 years)
- Other: dredging levy, local improvement districts

## *Grants and loans*

- Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB)
- Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO)
- Local and community projects, state capital budget



# Formation 101

*Last port formed: Port of Grandview, 1988*

*Recent attempts:*

- Yakima County, defeated in 2002 (2:1 margin) and 1988
- Kittitas County and Spokane County have looked into it
- My most recent conversation?: Okanagan County!



*General process:*

- Must have an assessed valuation of at least \$150 million.
- Petition from at least 10 percent of proposed district voters
- Petition describes boundaries, selects either three or five commissioners, describes districts if they are chosen, and chooses a name.
- County holds a hearing after notice; County submits the ballot proposition to the voters at the next election.
- The initial port commissioners may be selected at the same election, or at the next election after the port is formed.

# Port Powers-A Continuous Evolution

*Additional powers have been granted by Legislature to fill various needs*

**1955 - Industrial Development Districts**-transforming underutilized sites for maximum public benefit

**1955 - Leasing and Selling Property**-encourage private development by leveraging public resources

**1959 – Toll Bridges and Toll Tunnels**-Construct, operate, purchase, lease, improve contract for operation

**1965 – Park and Recreation Facilities**- to improve utilization of port facilities

**1975- Pollution Control Facilities**- Provide services to businesses

**1985 - Economic Development Programs**- broad authority to encourage growth and build infrastructure- very important!!!





# WA Ports as Economic Engines

Ports drive local economic development strategy through execution of their comprehensive plans

Port Economic Development strategies are tied directly with the Department of Commerce and other local and regional leaders. Partnerships are critical to attracting new business and growing existing priorities, including manufacturing.

## Ports respond to local needs with expanded authority

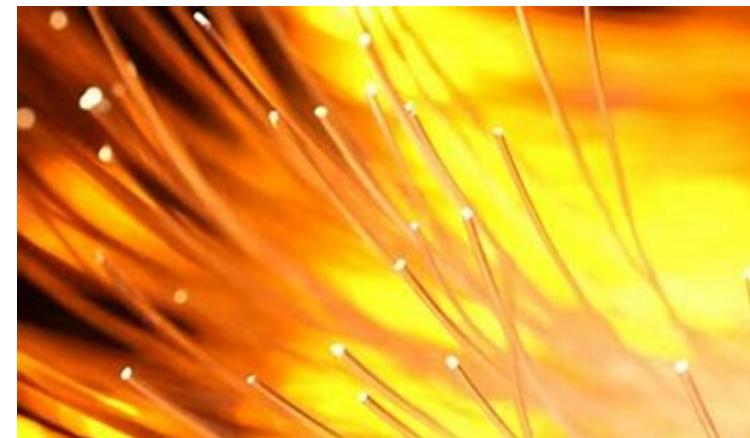
- ✓ Tourism Promotion added in 2009
- ✓ Wholesale Broadband Authority added in 2018
- ✓ Workforce Development added in 2019

## Examples of Partnerships at Work

Seven ports serve as their communities “Associate Development Organizations”

-ADO's are a frontline resource helping provide resources to small businesses within their communities

The Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) is a critical resource for ports by providing funding for planning grants and new project development and construction costs.





# WA Ports and Transportation

Transportation infrastructure is critical to ports achieving our economic development mission.

The system must be a competitive advantage for ports: it must be safe, efficient and well-maintained.

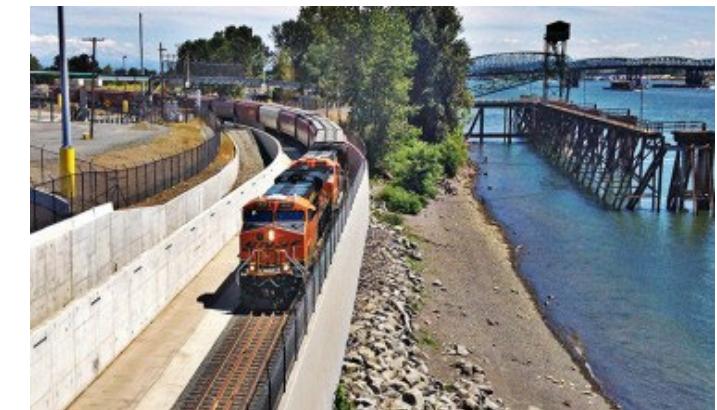
Ports fund important projects connecting agriculture and manufacturing to global consumers

Terminal 5 - Port of Seattle/Northwest Seaport Alliance, \$500m investment in trade

Inland seaports - Ports of Benton and Walla Walla looking at developing transload hubs

Columbia River Ports - Maintaining river depths to maximize exports

Expanding Rail Access to Marine Terminals - Ports of Everett, Longview and Bellingham



Robust Freight Investment is a State Competitiveness Priority

The Puget Sound Gateway and the Interstate Bridge Replacement have statewide impact, benefitting multiple ports

Insufficient investment in maintenance and preservation will result in decreased safety

Fund the system. Ports are as likely to be located on a city street or county road as a state highway



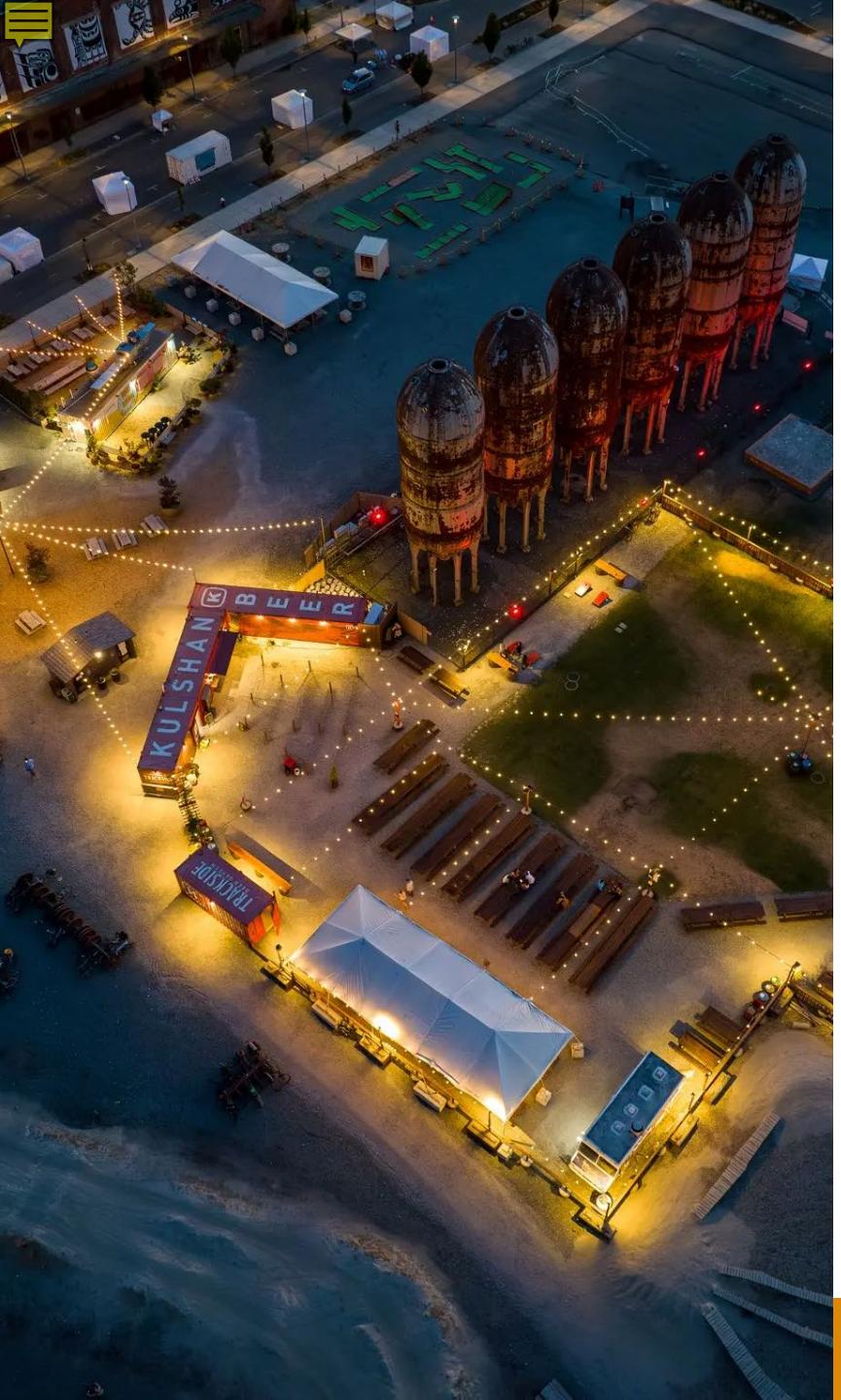
# WA Ports and Aviation

Ports operate 37 airports statewide, including 7 of the state's 12 commercial service airports.

All airports, including General Aviation airports, provide important services to their communities, including: flight and safety training, emergency air medical services, tactical wildland firefighting support and other commercial support.

The good news: larger airport receive up to 90% of infrastructure costs through federal airport improvement program funding (Smaller airports often receive no federal funding - rely on help from state programs administered by WSDOT)





# WA Ports and Environmental Cleanup

**Ports are uniquely situated to take on complex, long-term cleanup projects.**

**They can take underused or areas of limited public access back to productive use or public access in local communities or on waterfronts.**

**EX: The Portal at Port of Bellingham**

**Ports are able to partner with local communities and state or federal agencies to secure funding and navigate the cleanup process.**



# WAHKIAKUM PORT DISTRICT #1

Formed in 1958 (one of 12 formed that year) – Wahkiakum Port #2 was formed in 1966

## Elochoman Slough Marina

- Process began in 1966, area identified for future basin with commercial moorage
- 1972, marina open for business
- Now?: Moorage for up to 300 boats

## More infrastructure:

- 1987: Built storage units
- 1999: Built BBQ area and restrooms
- 2004: Built RV Park
- 2006: Began building cabins to accompany campsites
- 2023: New dock facilities and upgraded fuel tank

## More exciting things in Cathlamet:

- River Mile 38 Brewing, opened in 2024
- Elochoman Marina Street Market

# CHELAN DOUGLAS REGIONAL PORT AUTHORITY

Comprised of two ports! – Functional consolidation in 2019

- Six commissioners, two countywide port districts: Port of Chelan and Port of Douglas County
- Shared staff, collaborative operations

Operate across *many* port business lines:

- Aviation (Pangborn Memorial Airport)
- Industrial development
- Innovative business recruitment – data centers developing in Chelan and Douglas Counties

Focus on improving the community – Pybus Market, Trades District, Craft District, Regional Sports Complex





# PORT OF COLUMBIA

Formed in 1958, along with nine other Central and Eastern WA ports  
– spurred by prospect of development along Snake River

Lyons Ferry Marina – established following Little Goose Dam completion, at a site leased from US Army Corps

Industrial park facilities, tenants include:

- Red Band Cellars, winemaker
- USDA regional office
- Local trucking and logistics company

Blue Mountain Station Food Park – co-op market and commercial kitchen facility for local vendors and food producers

Columbia Walla Walla rail line – owner since 1996, freight connection between Dayton, WA and Weston, OR





**Questions?**

*Thank you for having me!*

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