

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

April 17, 2025

Project# 30923.0

To: Adam Fiss, RTC
From: Camilla Dartnell and Matt Bell, Kittelson
CC: Justin Sheets, PE, and Nikki Davis, DKS
RE: RTC Gorge Region Comprehensive Safety Action Plan Community Engagement Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) is leading the development of a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for SW Washington Gorge Region. The aim of this planning effort is to improve safety in the study area for the traveling public by achieving zero fatal and serious injury collisions on roadways and across all modes of transportation.

To better consider the different insights across the region the Safety Action Plan recognizes the pivotal role that community engagement plays in this effort. RTC recognizes that a robust Community Engagement Strategy can enable a stronger and safer regional transportation network that reflects the shared values and aspirations of the community.

This Community Engagement Strategy is rooted in a commitment of inclusivity aimed at gathering input from a diversity of interested parties. The following memorandum outlines the anticipated agency, project partner, and community engagement that will occur over the next year.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Description and Schedule

RTC was awarded FY24 Safe Streets and Roads for All¹ (SS4A) grant funds in order to develop a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan to reduce roadway fatalities and serious injury collisions. The plan will establish a vision, incorporate data analysis, and include outreach efforts necessary to develop a comprehensive set of prioritized projects and strategies. A future phase will include the application for state and federal funds to design, build and operate these identified improvements.

The project kicked off in February 2025 and is expected to be completed by February 2026. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the schedule with key tasks.

¹ <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/SS4A>

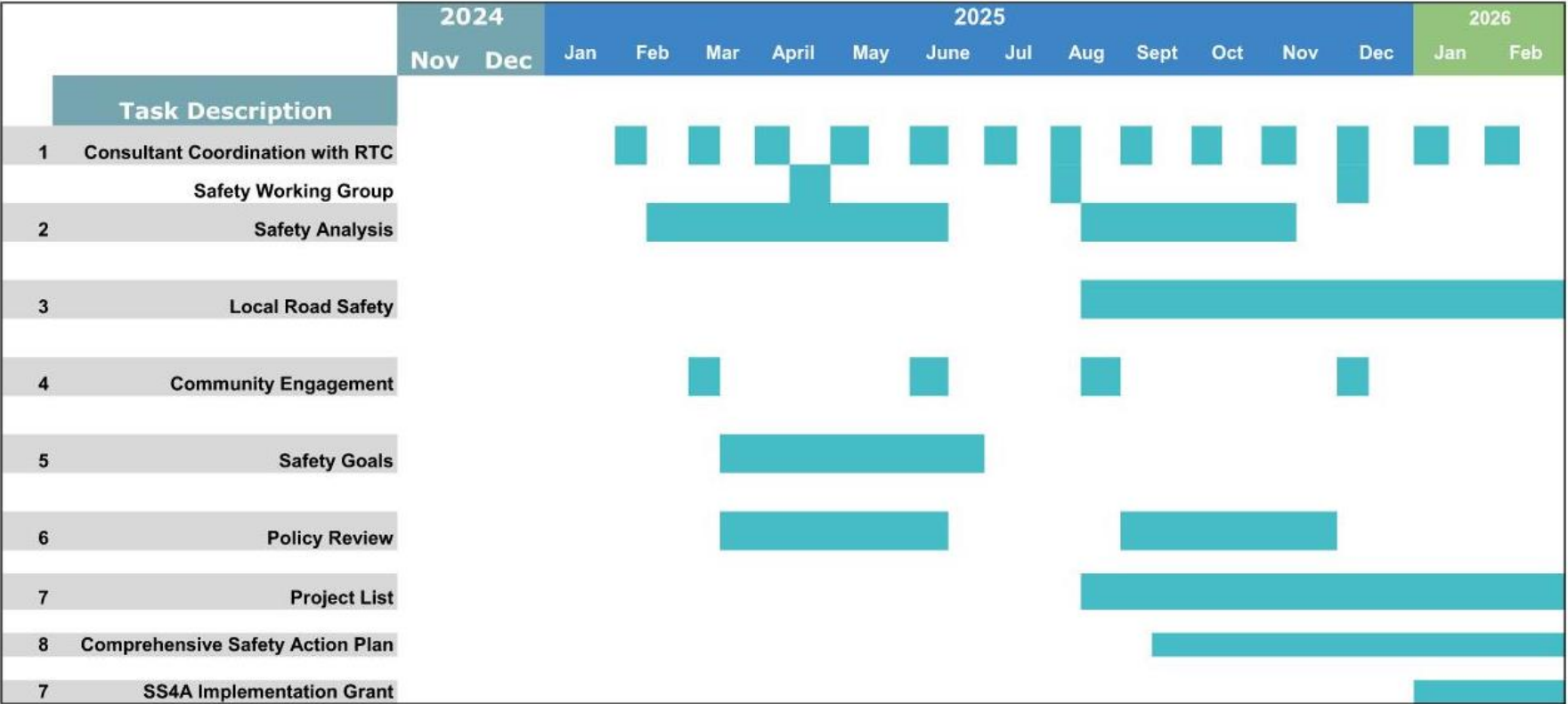


Figure 1: Project Schedule

Study Area and Demographics

The study area includes Skamania County and Klickitat County, with a special focus on the urbanized areas within these counties, which includes the cities of White Salmon, Bingen, Stevenson, and Goldendale.

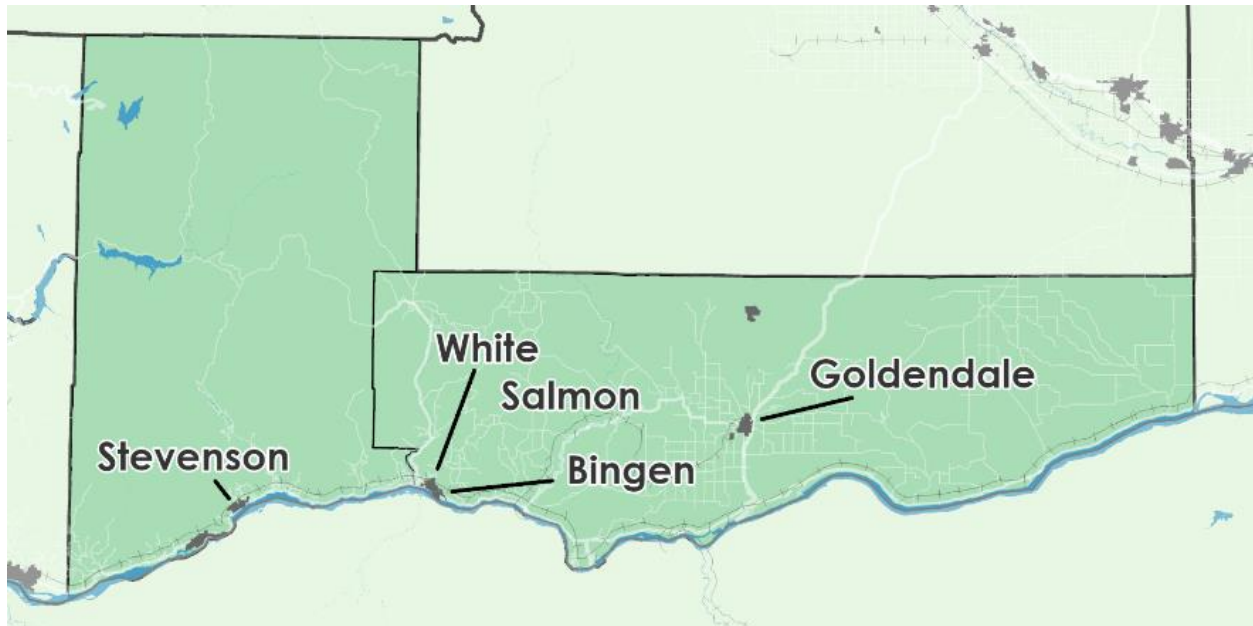


Figure 2: Project Study Area

DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

The demographic assessment that underlays this memorandum draws on the 2024 Regional Transportation Plans for Skamania County and Klickitat County. These plans provide a general understanding of the demographics in the study area to help inform community engagement strategies. A more robust demographic assessment will be performed later in the project to provide a more detailed understanding of where crashes are occurring in comparison to demographics.

The *Demographic Profile for Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat Counties*² shows that both counties have diverse populations, with people of color making up 22% of Klickitat County and 16.4% of Skamania County. Klickitat County also has a higher percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native people than Skamania County (3.2% versus 2.9%), and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation overlaps with the northern section of Klickitat County. The data also shows that 95.1% of people in Klickitat County and 99.0% of people in Skamania County speak English well, with Spanish or Spanish Creole the predominant languages spoken at home by others for both counties. Socioeconomic data indicates that a significant portion of residents are low-income, with 30.9% of Klickitat County residents and 22.9% of Skamania residents living below 200% of the poverty level.

In addition to RTC's demographic profile, the project team developed an index to further review demographic information. The data used for the index is from the U.S. Census Bureau's American

² https://rtc.wa.gov/agency/docs/EJ-Demographic-Profile-RTPO-2024_Final.pdf

Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates (ACS 2022). For Skamania County, the index shows that block groups near Stevenson and Carson are within the 50th to 80th percentiles for the state. Klickitat County has larger coverage of block groups with a higher than 50th percentile, including those covering most population centers like Goldendale, Lyle, Bingen, Klickitat, Appleton, Wahkiacus, Bickleton, and the northeastern section of White Salmon. The block group that includes land surrounding Husum, B Z Corner, and Snowden has the highest index within the two-county area, equating to 80th to 90th percentile in the state. *See Attachment A for the demographic index maps.*

AGENCY AND PROJECT PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

RTC is dedicated to coordination between planning and transportation departments, committees, boards and commissions of the RTC member agencies and partners. This section outlines planned engagement activities with established agency partners.

Safety Working Group

The project team will coordinate with key project partners through a Safety Working Group (SWG), which will be made up of the existing Klickitat and Skamania County Regional Transportation Policy Committees (TPCs) as well as key additional project partners relevant to roadway safety. The role of the SWG is to:

- Have a deep understanding and awareness of the Safety Action Plan
- Provide feedback at key stages of Safety Action Plan development
- Provide community engagement connections to maximize plan engagement and support
- Develop a group to support the implementation and monitoring after plan finalization

The SWG will meet three times throughout the project. Exhibit 1 presents the role of the SWG for and purpose of each meeting.

Meeting #1 (April 2025)

- Introduce Safety Action Plan, discuss process and clarify roles of members, share community outreach plan, and share safety assessment results
- **Role of SWG: Provide context and local knowledge; review and provide feedback**

Meeting #2 (August 2025 - Tentative)

- Present and discuss initial solutions
- **Role of SWG: Review and provide feedback**

Meeting #3 (December 2025 - Tentative)

- Review the draft Safety Action Plan content, discuss implementation grant ideas, and set the plan up for implementation
- **Role of SWG: Review and provide feedback; advocate for the plan and connect with local community partners to support implementation**

Exhibit 1: SWG Meeting Purposes

Tables 5 and 6 identify the SWG members for Skamania County and Klickitat County, respectively. This is the initial list of members, and the project team will externally track and update the list as needed throughout the life of the project.

Table 1: Skamania County Safety Working Group Members

Agency/Organization	Contact Person
City of Stevenson	Ben Shumaker
Federal Highway Administration	Boem Kim
Skamania County	Brian Nichols
City of Stevenson	Carolyn Sourek
RTC	Dale Robins
WSDOT	Danae Austenfeld
Skamania County	David Waymire
WSDOT	Dylan Bass
RTC	Jennifer Campos
Port of Cascade Locks	Jeremiah Blue
MCEDD	Kathy Fitzpatrick
Washington Representative	Kevin Waters
Gorge Commission	Krystyna Wolniakowski
WSDOT	Laurie Lebowsky-Young
Skamania County	Lisa Sackos
RTC	Matt Ransom
Skamania County Transit	Maria Spencer
Port of Skamania	Pat Albaugh
WSDOT	Robert Klug
Skamania County	Sadi' Souder Pettenger
Target Zero Manager Region 6 (Clark & Skamania Counties)	Jesamie Peters
Skamania County Sheriff	Summer Scheyer
Skamania County EMS	Ann Lueders

Table 2: Klickitat County Safety Working Group Members

Agency/Organization	Contact Person
City of White Salmon	Andrew Dirks
WSDOT, Maintenance	Bill VanAntwerp
Federal Highway Administration	Boem Kim
City of Bingen	Catherine Kiewit
RTC	Dale Robins
WSDOT	Danae Austenfeld
Klickitat County	David Spratt
WSDOT	Dylan Bass
MCEDD	Kathy Fitzpatrick
Port of Hood River	Kevin Greenwood

City of Bingen	Krista Loney
Gorge Commission	Krystyna Wolniakowski
City of Goldendale	Larry Bellamy
WSDOT	Laurie Lebowsky-Young
Port of Klickitat	Margie Ziegler
City of White Salmon	Marla Keethler
RTC	Matt Ransom
City of Goldendale	Mayor Dave Jones
Hood River-White Salmon Bridge Authority	Michael Shannon
Klickitat County	Richard Foster
WSDOT - Grants	Rob Klug
Klickitat County	Ron Ihrig
City of White Salmon	Russ Avery
Klickitat County	Seth Scarola
Mt Adams Transit	Sharon Carter
WSDOT	Thomas Prendergast
Target Zero Manager Region 13 (Klickitat County)	Maria Lopez
Klickitat County Sheriff	Bob Songer
Goldendale Police Chief	Mike Smith
Department of Emergency Management	Jeff King
White Salmon Policy Chief	Mike Hepner

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

At key points in the development of the Safety Action Plan and through multiple methods described below, the project team will work to reach a broader community for input. The team will target local and regional community-based organizations, members of the public, multimodal representatives, safe routes to school coordinators, disabled community representatives, and other stakeholders. Resources will be distributed widely with the intention of capturing a broad range of public participants.

Public Involvement Goals

A key purpose of this Public Involvement and Communications Plan is to identify project partners to engage and how to engage them throughout the Project. The Project Team has identified the following goals important for the project, in alignment with the model shared in Figure 6:

1. **Inform** the project partners and the public in the study area that this is a current Project and what the project schedule is in an accessible manner.
2. **Consult and Involve** community members, businesses, and interested organizations, including historically underserved populations, to identify safety needs, solutions, and priorities.
3. **Collaborate** with project partners to develop supported solutions and long-term interest in plan implementation.

Contact/Comment Database

To support engagement of individuals and organizations interested in staying engaged with the Safety Action Plan, RTC will develop and maintain a contact and comment database. The database will be used to distribute project information and document comments received on the project. RTC will coordinate with member agencies to initially populate the contact database, and individuals or organizations who reach out or participate during the project will have the option to be added, too, so that they stay engaged in the Safety Action Plan development.

Public Outreach Materials

To support information sharing and engagement throughout the project, RTC will host a webpage that shares information about the project, including the purpose, schedule, and opportunities for public comment. In addition to the two online open houses, outlined below, the website will include contact information that can be used for outreach at any point during the project.

In addition to the website, two newsletters or press releases will be generated and distributed during the project. These are intended to be used to advertise the online open houses, but may be used for other purposes, if the need should arise.

Public Engagement

While the project website will provide members of the public to comment at all stages of the project, there will be two main phases of public involvement where the project team seeks specific input from the public. Each phase will include engagement techniques specially tailored to collect valuable information in moving the project forward, building consensus, and making key decisions pertinent to that phase of the project.

- **Phase 1:** Gather input on existing conditions and safety needs, including key locations for investment.
 - Key tools/activities include:
 - An online open house in summer 2025, including an opportunity for members of the public to provide location specific concerns or recommendations. The online open house is expected to be active for approximately four weeks.
 - Two in-person tabling/surveying events presenting matching information from the online open house, targeting high traffic locations.
 - Supporting tools: Press releases and member agency postings to share news of the online open house.
- **Phase 2:** Gather input on the proposed countermeasures and selected projects.
 - Key tools/activities include:
 - An online open house in fall 2025 to provide an opportunity for the public to give input on the countermeasures and projects. The online open house is expected to be active for approximately four weeks.
 - Two in-person tabling/surveying events presenting matching information as the online open house, targeting high traffic locations.
 - Supporting tools: Press releases and member agency postings to share news of the online open house.

Online open houses will be advertised before and during their launch and a summary of each event will be developed to track input received. A final engagement summary will provide an overview of engagement activities and input received throughout the project as a whole. After each phase of public outreach, the project team should track and report on participation considerations like the following:

- Number of total responses
- Number of fliers posted
- Geographic range of input (based on zip codes)
- Respondent demographics (ranges of income, age, race etc.) in comparison to the study area

In addition, the project team should regularly consider and discuss how this input is being incorporated into decision making and understand the effects of this input. These conversations should happen both in advance of outreach, to help craft thoughtful materials and a thoughtful outreach program, as well as through reflection after results have been collected, to be most effective.

TARGET LOCATIONS

Attending community events is a valuable strategy for reaching residents where they already gather. The events listed below were selected based on several factors, including their geographic location within the study area, the anticipated size and diversity of attendees, and their appeal to families and multi-generational audiences. These events also offer opportunities for meaningful interaction, allowing project staff to engage with people who may not typically participate in formal planning processes. Many of the events are high-visibility and well-attended, providing a cost-effective way to raise awareness of the project and direct the public to online open houses or the project website. Table 7 lists potential areas within the study area that should be targeted for outreach through tabling and surveying. Permission will need to be granted for most of these locations.

Table 3: Potential Events for Outreach

Location(s)	Notes
Food Banks: Stevenson, Bingen, Klickitat, and Goldendale Food Banks	Provides the opportunity to engage with lower income or higher need individuals. Will need to make materials appropriate for clipboard only engagement to take car to car. This provides less opportunity for large maps.
Gorge Transit	Potential for in-person surveying on the buses.
Farmer's Markets: Stevenson Waterfront Farmers Market; White Salmon Farmers Market; Goldendale Farmer's Market	Stevenson Waterfront Farmers Market is mid-June through mid-October from 10AM – 2PM on Saturdays. White Salmon Farmers Market is June through September from 4PM – 7PM on Tuesdays. Goldendale Farmers Market is May through September from 9AM – 2PM on Saturdays.
Skamania County Spring Fest	Includes a vintage sale, garage sale, and plant sale at the Exhibit Hall & Stock Barn Skamania County Fairgrounds, Stevenson. May 2 –3, 2025.
Walking Man Brewing Summer Music Series	May – September; Thursdays from 6PM – 8PM.

One Prevention Alliance Community Coalition Bike Rodeo	In conjunction with Skamania County Sheriff's office, Skyline Health, and Washington State Health Care Authority. May 17, 2025.
Stevenson Waterfront Public State Live Music Summer Series	May 17 – Oct 11 from 6PM – 9PM on Saturdays.
Nights in White Salmon	Involves live music, performances, and markets. While information has not been updated for 2025, in previous years the event ran June through October on the third Thursday of the month.
Klickitat County Fair and Rodeo: 2025 Hawaiian Hoedown	August 13-17 in Goldendale.

KEY ADVERTISING LOCATIONS

Advertising for the public events will be important to make sure a diverse cross section of the public knows about the project and opportunities to provide input. It will be important for RTC and local jurisdictions to provide the link to the online open houses to their email listservs and social media sites. In addition, the project team recommends posting project fliers advertising the public events at key locations, like those listed below. These have been chosen as locations that are likely to have local bulletins, higher use by residents, and use by a broad cross section of individuals. In addition to those specific locations listed in Table 8, general outreach to a wide range of organizations, including those tracked and listed through the [Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce](#), [Skamania County Chamber of Commerce](#), and [Greater Goldendale Area Chamber of Commerce](#) may be helpful about spreading the word about the events.

Table 4: Potential Advertising Locations

Location(s)	Notes
Carson General Store; White Salmon Harvest Market; Dickey Farms, Inc	Local stores; may have bulletin opportunity
USPS Locations	May have bulletin opportunity
Libraries: Stevenson Community Library; White Salmon Valley Community Library; Goldendale Community Library	May have bulletin opportunity; internet access at the library provides opportunity to partake in online open house
White Salmon Mountain View Grange	Community center
Home Valley Store (east of Carson); Main Street Convenience Store; Hegewald Center	Gorge Transit Stop; may have bulletin opportunity
One Community Health Northshore	May have bulletin opportunity

NEXT STEPS

This memorandum will be used to guide the agency, partner, and public engagement throughout the project. The first SWG meeting is anticipated to be on April 24th, 2025, with the first public engagement event following in June 2025. In addition, the project team should report on community engagement progress as the project moves forward to understand the impact of the events that are taking place.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Demographic Index Maps

Attachment A Demographic Index Maps

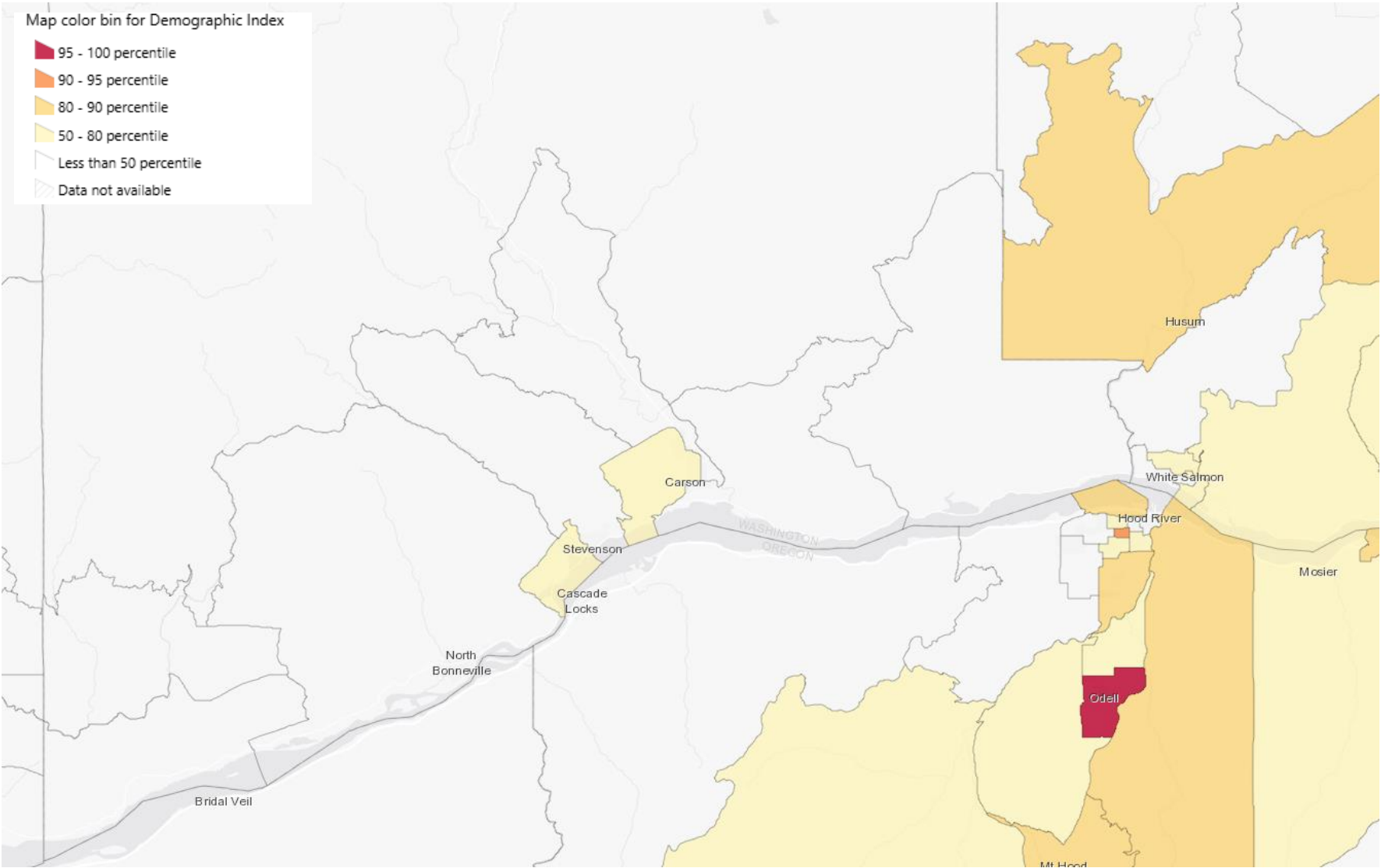


Figure 1: Gorge Area Skamania County Demographic Index, Compared to State

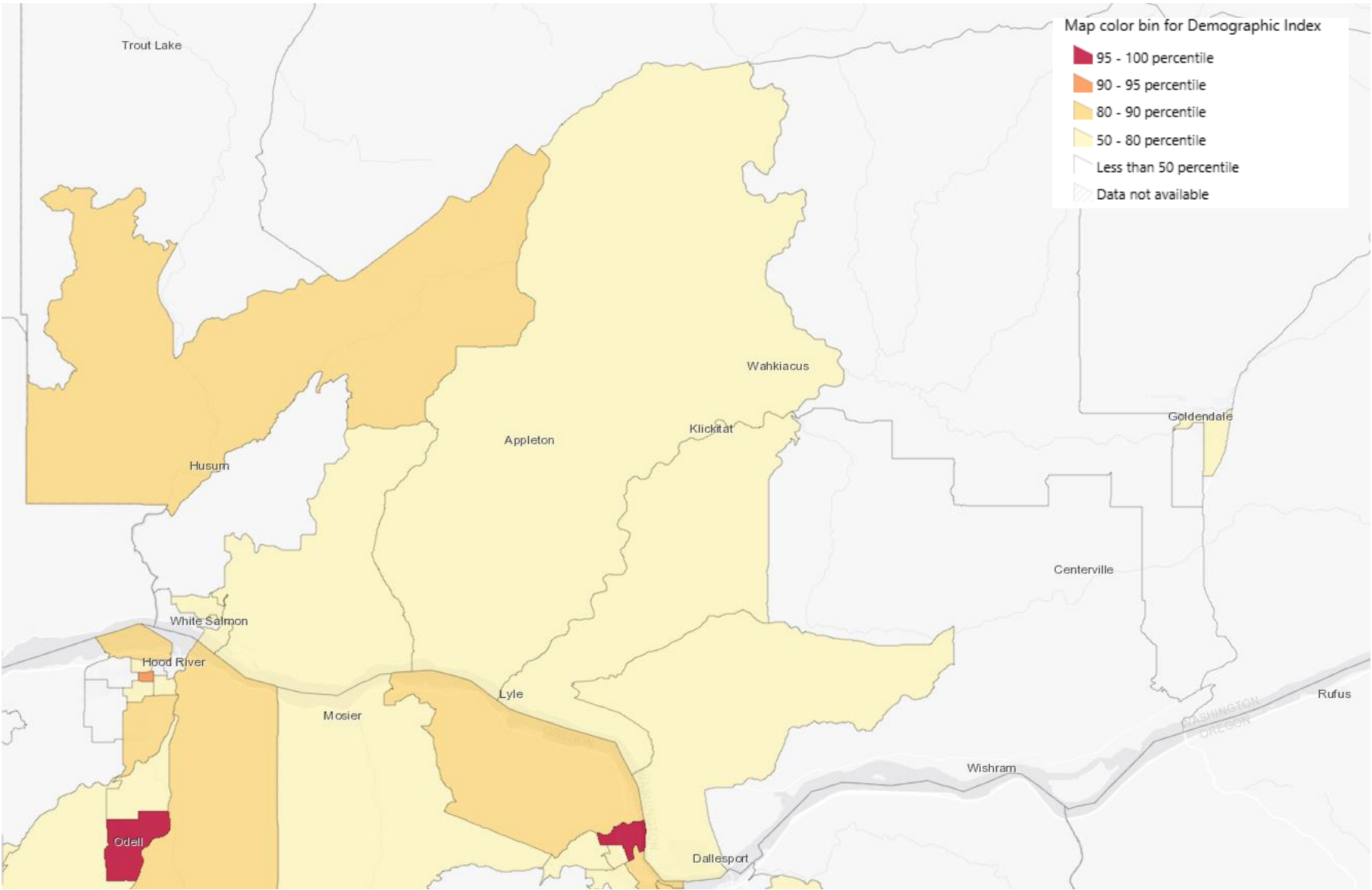


Figure 2: Western Gorge Area Klickitat County Demographic Index, Compared to State

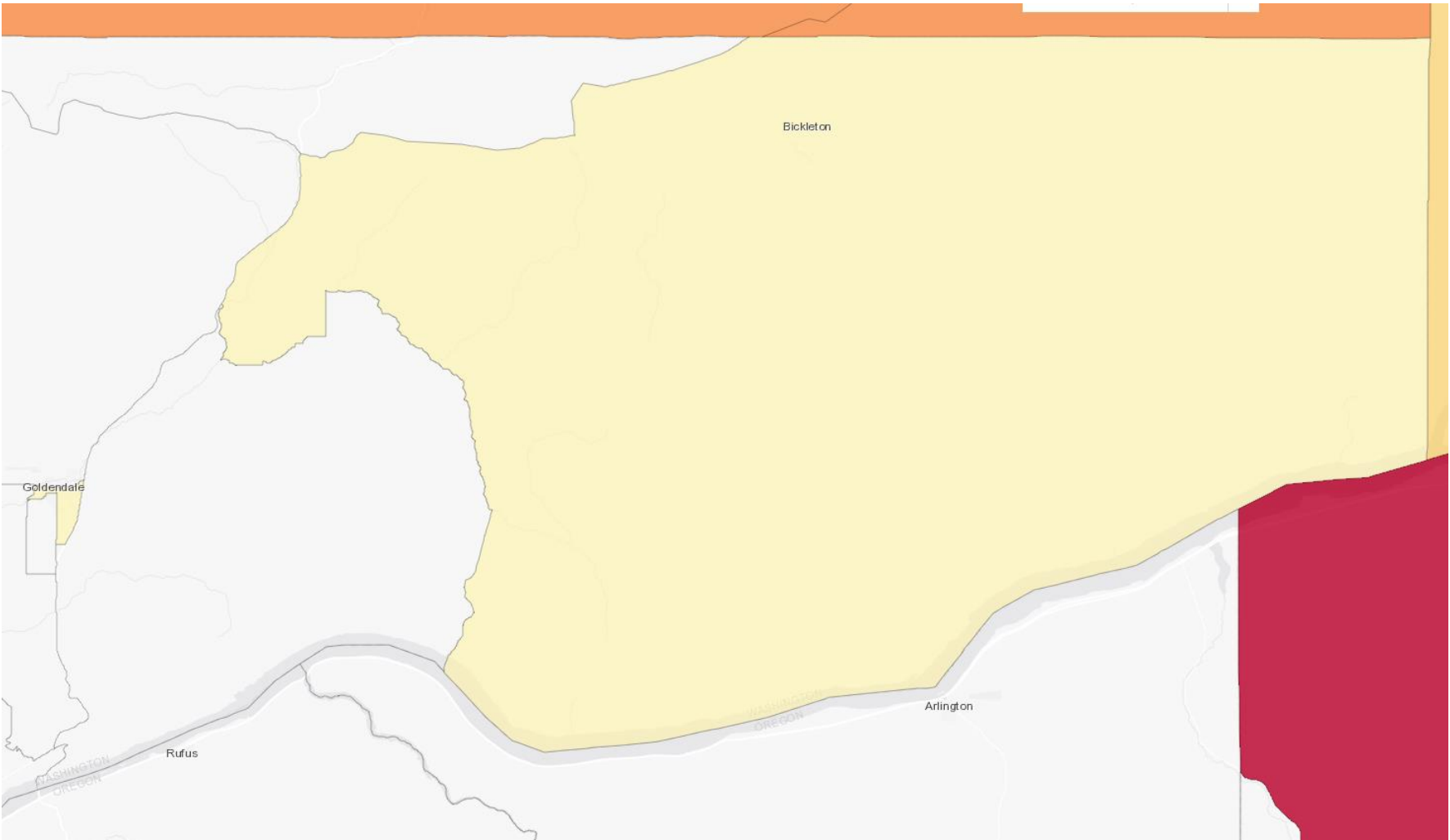


Figure 3: Eastern Gorge Area Klickitat County Demographic Index, Compared to State