



Historical Precedent

Formation of Pend Oreille County (1911)

Prepared for the Peninsula County Exploratory Committee (PCEC) as part of the foundational research into Washington State county formation precedent.

Purpose

Pend Oreille County, established in 1911, is Washington State's most recent county formation. It remains the clearest and most relevant legislative precedent for the creation of a new county within the State of Washington. This document provides a detailed review of the enabling legislation, boundary structure, financial apportionment provisions, governance transition framework, and historical context surrounding its formation.

Legislative Enactment

- Session Laws of Washington, 1911, Chapter 28 (House Bill 123).
- Passed House: February 10, 1911.
- Passed Senate: February 20, 1911.
- Approved by Governor Marion E. Hay: March 1, 1911.
- Law effective: June 8, 1911.
- County formally organized: June 10, 1911.

Statutory Boundary Definition

Section 1 of Chapter 28 detached a defined portion of Stevens County and created a new county, designated as Pend Oreille County. The statute contained a full metes-and-bounds description using township and range coordinates relative to the Willamette Meridian. This demonstrates that boundary precision was a core requirement of the enabling act itself.

Financial and Administrative Transition

The 1911 Act addressed financial apportionment in detail. Pend Oreille County assumed a proportional share of Stevens County indebtedness based on assessed valuation within the detached territory. The statute required tax roll transfers, record transcription, and allocation of property and liabilities. Specific provisions ensured equitable division of debt and protected each county from future liabilities arising after separation.

Governance Structure

- Governor-appointed initial board of three county commissioners.
- Temporary designation of Newport as county seat pending voter determination in 1912.
- Assignment to legislative districts for representation.
- Temporary judicial attachment to Stevens County.
- Authority for commissioners to divide the county into districts and appoint officers.

Historical Context

Population growth in eastern Stevens County and geographic travel barriers to Colville were primary drivers for separation. Between 1900 and 1910, the region experienced rapid population increases. Residents reported that reaching the county seat required multiple days of travel depending on season and road conditions. Local civic leaders petitioned the Legislature for division, and the measure passed with minimal opposition.

References and Source Documents

- Session Laws of Washington, 1911, Chapter 28 – Creating and Organizing Pend Oreille County.
- HistoryLink Essay 9771 – Governor Marion E. Hay signs bill creating Pend Oreille County (March 1, 1911).
- HistoryLink Essay 9772 – Pend Oreille County organized (June 10, 1911).
- Washington State Archives – Stevens County Board of Commissioners records relating to 1911 division.

Prepared for public distribution and legislative reference by the Peninsula County Exploratory Committee (PCEC).