

While the number of pilots may be declining nationally, in the West there is a significantly higher prevalence of pilots than in the nation as a whole. As shown in Figure 4-3, the national average is 229.5 license pilots per 100,000 population. However, in the West, the average is more than 50% higher. In the FAA Northwest Mountain Region (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), the average is 357.1 pilots per 100,000 population. In Washington State, the average is yet higher, at 366.3 per 100,000. The average in the PSRC region is higher still, with 372.8 licensed pilots per 100,000 population.

Figure 4-3: Licensed Pilots per Capita

	Nation	FAA NW Mt. Region*	State of Washington	PSRC Region
Population	269,429,000	17,632,010	5,685,300	3,149,700
Active Pilots	618,298	62,969	20,841	11,743
Active Pilots per 100,000	229.5	357.1	366.3	372.8

Sources: FAA, PSRC.

There are a number of possible explanations for the high numbers of pilots in the Northwest Mountain Region. For one, population density in the Northwest Mountain Region is lower than in other parts of the country: the distances between populations tend to be much greater, and flying is the fastest way to travel.

The high prevalence of pilots in the Puget Sound region is interesting, because the population density in the four-county area is much higher than in the rest of the Northwest Mountain Region. It is possible that the historic ties between Puget Sound and aviation (i.e., the number of people tied to Boeing) create more of an awareness of aviation, and people choose flying as an avocation.

4.3.2.2 FAA Forecast of Active Pilots

According to the RASP, the population of active pilots in the United States is forecast to increase at an average annual growth rate of 1.5% between 1999 and 2010, with a total increase of nearly 117,000 pilots for the period. For the entire long-range forecast period (1998-2025) the FAA predicts annual growth of 1.2%. This forecast reflects the industry view that current initiatives will foster the growth of student starts.

Increased student starts are expected to lead to larger numbers of pilots in other categories, particularly private pilots, over the course of the forecast period. The FAA’s forecasts show the following annual growth rates for the four major pilot groups: