



[A Sense of Hometown Pride in the Owens Valley](#)

By Jessica Johnson

When you head north on Highway 395 towards Mammoth Lakes, you pass by the small towns of Lone Pine, Independence, Big Pine and the city of Bishop. Many travelers and visitors to the Eastern Sierra region often ask why they see so many LADWP vehicles, signs and facilities while traveling this route.

LADWP, on behalf of the City of Los Angeles, owns and maintains more than 314,000 acres of land in the Eastern Sierra in order to operate the Los Angeles Aqueduct System. Between the Water Operations Division and Power System Divisions, LADWP Northern District has more than 300 employees who work and live in Kern, Inyo and Mono Counties.

Working as biologists, maintenance and construction helpers, aqueduct and reservoir keepers, real estate officers and power plant operators, among many other positions, these employees are not only part of the Owens Valley community today, many also grew up here and attended local schools. In fact, there are over 100 employees who are alumni of Bishop Union High School, Big Pine, Owens Valley or Lone Pine High School. For many, working in the community they grew up and went to school in evokes a sense of hometown pride that makes working for LADWP in the Owens Valley unique.

Lori Gillem, a Watershed Resources Supervisor and LADWP employee of 17 years, did not plan to work for the Department when she left college, and did not have plans to return to the Valley. Towards the end of Lori's undergraduate program, her father, who was an electrical distribution mechanic in the Owens Valley, encouraged her to start taking civil service exams.

"The Owens Valley is a unique and difficult location to move to. The rural life can be a hard adjustment for young adults and families; however, I do feel a sense of hometown pride. It is fun to give back by helping judge local science fairs and assisting advanced biology students with projects," said Gillem. "It feels good to be able to be a part of the community as a resident and an LADWP employee."

Small town living is not for everyone, but for LADWP's Northern District employees, having an office in the Eastern Sierra is a perfect fit.