U.S. Government lands, either Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management, are located generally in the mountains and along the edge of the mountains or on the Volcanic Tableland. Of the 307,000 acres owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in the Owens Valley and the Mono Basin drainage basins, most of the land (240,000 acres) is located on the valley floor of the Owens Valley.

The main economic activities in the valley are livestock ranching and tourism. About 190,000 acres of the valley floor is leased by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to ranchers for grazing and about 12,400 additional acres is leased for growing alfalfa pasture. Access to most lands in the mountains and the valley is open to the public, and tens of thousands of people each year utilize the many recreational benefits such as hunting, fishing, skiing, and camping.

Since the early 1900's, water use in the Owens Valley has changed from meeting local needs, such as ranching and farming, to exporting some surface water, to exporting a greater quantity of both surface and ground water. The major historical periods with similar water use are summarized in Table 4.

As of 1988, water use within the valley involves both surface-water diversions and ground-water pumping. About 1,200 to 2,000 acre-ft/yr of ground water is supplied to the four major towns in the valley—Bishop, population 10,352; Big Pine, population 1,610; Independence, population 655; and Lone Pine, population 2,062 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990). Other in-valley uses of water are for Indian reservations and for stockwater, irrigation of pastures, and cultivation of alfalfa. Fish Springs and Blackrock fish hatcheries rely on ground water, and the Mt. Whitney fish hatchery.