

EDITORIAL

[Katrina rages on](#)

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GUT ENDANGERED species protections. Sell off parks. And why not start drilling off the California coast? These lunk-headed notions, all considered political nonstarters only weeks ago, now pass as plausible debate points, post-Hurricane Katrina.

It's a sign of Democratic weakness and Republican skill that the environment has become a resource to milk and not a public treasure to save. Fringe ideas are now moving toward the mainstream.

GOP mandates to cut both the federal budget and taxes started the ball rolling. Then came the devastation of Katrina and Rita. The quick succession of events is unraveling a public consensus on environmental safeguards.

Rep. Richard Pombo, a Tracy Republican, has pushed through a drastic rewrite of the 30-year-old Endangered Species Act that aims at one goal: rewarding property owners at the expense of declining wildlife and plants. Though his measure passed the House, it faces opposition in the Senate where it should be stopped.

He has also let fly with the idea of selling 15 historic sites, such as playwright Eugene O'Neill's home in Danville, to plug possible cuts to the parks system. He has backed off the plan for now.

Other Republicans in Congress pulled back a proposal for expanded drilling in coastal waters. In California, leaders of both parties have long opposed renewed drilling. But Congress end up leaving the matter up to each state, no ironclad pledge.

The hurricanes were bad enough. But the disasters have led to other perils that compound the damage.