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## **Protect National Wildlife Refuge**

*By Eddie Konczal*

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, now plans to use the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina as yet another excuse to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling.

What is the ANWR? It's a natural habitat for not only more than 250 species of wildlife but also the indigenous people of the Gwich'in Nation. The ANWR spans 19 million acres of wilderness across northeastern Alaska and represents an astonishing variety of ecological zones, from coastal tundra to forest to mountains. It's the largest wildlife refuge in the United States and has been protected for more than 50 years.

Republicans claim opening the ANWR for drilling would help America achieve energy independence. Not so; geologists estimate it would only provide about six months of oil, which would not reach the market for at least 10 years. The real way for America to achieve energy independence is to vigorously pursue fuel efficiency in new cars - especially sport utility vehicles, which are exempt from fuel efficiency standards due to a legislative loophole. But congressional Republicans don't want Americans to conserve oil; that would hurt the profits of the oil companies that help finance their campaigns.

Americans must reject the Republicans' continued effort to usurp our natural resources. I urge everyone who believes in protecting our environment to contact their representatives in Congress and ask them to oppose any efforts to open the ANWR for oil drilling.

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