

Supercharging a hurricane

Katrina drew extra energy from a tongue of warm water several hundred feet thick poking into the Gulf of Mexico. The source of the warm water was the so-called Loop Current, a stream of water from the Caribbean that circulates through the Gulf and exits south of Florida, feeding into the

Gulf Stream. This August the Loop stretched farther north than usual, right along the path of the slow-moving storm. "It was just sitting for more than 12 hours over the Loop Current," says oceanographer Isaac Ginis. "This was one of the key factors in the intensification."