



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 10, 2012

Teens Sue Government for Global Warming

A group of California teenagers is suing the federal government for endangering the survival of their generation. They hold government responsible for global warming because it hasn't reduced national emissions of carbon dioxide. The teens filed suit in the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., which is scheduled on Friday to hear motions to dismiss the case.



The juvenile plaintiffs are part of an organization called [Kids vs. Global Warming](#), founded by then 12-year-old Alec Loorz of Ventura, California. Now a high-school senior, he says the lawsuit is vital to his survival. "The government has a legal responsibility to protect the future for our children," Loorz [declared](#). "So we are demanding that they recognize the atmosphere as a commons that needs to be preserved, and commit to a plan to reduce emissions to a safe level." Specifically, the youths demand an immediate cap on greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions and a six-percent reduction every year starting in 2013.

Writing in [The Atlantic](#), Katherine Ellison explains this idea of an "atmospheric commons" comes from Oregon attorney Julia Olson and colleague Mary Christina Wood, attempting to build on the idea of the "public trust doctrine," which dictates government action such as issuing hunting licenses to control wildlife populations. As founder of the environmental non-profit [Our Children's Trust](#), Olson invited Loorz and his companions to file the suit. Defendants in [Alec L. et. al. vs. Lisa P. Jackson, et. al.](#) include U.S. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and secretaries of the interior, agriculture, commerce, energy, and defense departments. The law firm of former Republican U.S. Representative Paul McCloskey is representing the plaintiffs *pro bono*.

In April a federal judge allowed various business groups, including the National Association of Manufacturers, to join the case as [intervenor-defendants](#). They claim the plaintiffs have no legal standing to sue because they can prove neither the defendants are culpable for global atmospheric conditions, nor that a favorable outcome would compensate for their supposed injuries. Their [motion to dismiss](#) makes the following points:

- The GHG restrictions called for "could substantially eliminate the use of conventional energy in this country" and "would have profound consequences for the Nation's economic development and productivity, social policies, security interests and international standing."



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- “Plaintiffs ask this Court to take control over legislative and executive authority involving extraordinarily complex scientific and policy issues” and to continually monitor these agencies for satisfactory results.
- Supreme Court precedent states the public trust doctrine is “a matter of state law.”

Defendants are confident the case will be thrown out, but Loorz remains optimistic. He credits Al Gore’s Academy Award-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, with inspiring his environmental activism. Ironically, about the time Loorz founded Kids vs. Global Warming, the British High Court [ruled](#) that, due to nine significant scientific errors in Gore’s documentary, schools in the U.K. had to provide guidance notes if they showed the film to students. Otherwise, the judge said, he would have ruled distribution of the film an “unlawful contravention of an Act of Parliament prohibiting the political indoctrination of children.”

Kids vs. Global Warming and its ad hoc [iMatter Movement](#) are projects of the [Earth Island Institute](#), a multi-million dollar non-profit that funds dozens of [grass-roots environmental projects](#), especially those dedicated to recruiting youth activists. It is, in turn, sponsored by federal grants and groups such as the [Rockefeller Brothers Fund](#).



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