

Pensacola teen sues Florida over its 'indifference' to climate change

Kevin Robinson, krobinson4@pnj.com Published 4:43 p.m. CT April 17, 2018 | Updated 10:44 a.m. CT April 19, 2018

Experts predict dramatic changes in weather across Europe, US and Africa as scientists warn circulation of the Atlantic Ocean is at it weakest point in more Buzz60



(Photo: Courtesy of 350 Pensacola)

CONNECTTWEETLINKEDIN 6COMMENTEMAILMORE

Update 10:40 a.m. Thursday

A spokesman for Gov. Rick Scott issued a statement Thursday morning in response to the lawsuit.

"The Governor signed one of the largest environmental protection budgets in Florida's history last month — investing \$4 billion into Florida's environment. The Governor is focused on real solutions to protect our environment — not political theater or a lawsuit orchestrated by a group based in Eugene, Oregon," said spokesman McKinley Lewis in an email to the News Journal.

Original story

A 14-year-old from Pensacola is suing the state of Florida and several of its officials for their "deliberate indifference" to the damaging effects of climate change.

Oliver Chamblin is one of eight youths between the ages of 10 and 20 who allege they are being harmed by man-made green house gas pollution and adverse environmental impacts like rising sea levels, violent storms, increasing temperatures and beach and farmland erosion.

[Oliver joined his fellow plaintiffs](#) Tuesday for a press conference in Miami. He told the assembled crowd he grew up fishing, swimming and kayaking in the waters of Bayou Grande, and the government wasn't doing enough to ensure future generations of Floridians would have those same opportunities.

"Our state relies very much on tourism," Oliver said. "If we destroy our climate and our beaches, it can affect that (industry) very much. We are called the Sunshine State, but we don't take advantage of that because we could be using solar power and we don't. I'm suing the government to help take action against those things."

The lawsuit was filed in Leon County Court on Monday. It names Gov. Rick Scott as a defendant, along with several other state officers and agencies, including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Public Service Commission.

More: [After pushing bill to abolish EPA, Rep. Matt Gaetz joins Climate Solutions Caucus](#)

The suit essentially levies two charges against state officials.

The first is that Florida has failed to protect public trust resources like state waters, forests, wetlands, groundwater and wildlife. The plaintiffs' complaint argues the state's "systemic, historic and ongoing" practices of permitting and promoting fossil usage has caused substantial impairment to public assets.

U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz answers a question about the EPA during an "Open Gaetz Day" event at Grover T's BBQ in Milton, Florida on Thursday, February 23, 2017. Gregg Pachkowski/gregg@pnj.com

The second allegation is that Florida's failure to maintain an environment free of carbon and greenhouse gasses violates the young plaintiffs' constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The youth are supported by the nonprofit organization Our Children's Trust, which launched similar suits across the country three years ago. According to Our Children's Trust, a national lawsuit filed against the federal government on similar grounds is scheduled to go to trial this October in Oregon.

[The Florida complaint](#) — brought by youth from Miami-Dade, Alachua, Broward, Brevard, Escambia, Monroe and Hendry counties — asks for a court-ordered, science-based "Climate Recovery Plan," as well as multiple other actions, including that the state of Florida acknowledge that climate change impacts are harming the youth plaintiffs.

Oliver's grandfather, Larry Chamblin, is the founder of local environmental group 350 Pensacola, which works with other "350" organizations around the world to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Chamblin said his grandson had always been someone who was interested in the outdoors and the environment.

"To see him take a stand for the future of his generation and the future of the planet makes me proud," Chamblin said.

Kevin Robinson can be reached at krobinson4@pnj.com and 850-435-8527.