Teens sue state and feds over climate inaction

iMatter has burst onto the climate scene with a bang. The new youth-led campaign is organizing Mother’s Day marches on several continents. They also sued the federal government and the state of California earlier this week. The plaintiffs, who are mostly teenagers, charge that by failing to act on climate change the state and federal government have violated the public trust doctrine that requires them to preserve basic shared resources for future generations. Suits are also being filed against all of the other states.

“Young people will be affected most by climate change and by our government’s inaction,” explained iMatter’s 16-year-old founder Alec Loorz.

The legal principle of public trust has existed since Roman times and has been invoked in environmental cases including the one regarding Mono Lake.

Even so, the plaintiffs’ attorney Sharon Duggan claims the suit is groundbreaking. “No climate litigation in the past has ever gone back to the first principal that the government must protect the public trust,” she said. “The large body of litigation brought under environmental statutes is too narrow for the crisis at hand. [This is] the most common sense, fundamental legal footing for the protection of our planet.”

The New York Times suggests at least the case against the federal government is not likely to succeed. But with 51 public trust suits following on the heels of the public nuisance suit brought by several states, the courts will have make a series of rulings about climate change — and the issue will remain in the news.

An iMatter march will take place in San Francisco this Sunday at 1 p.m., leaving from Justin Herman Plaza.