

Young environmental activists prevail in first-of-its-kind climate change trial in Montana



1 of 2 | FILE - Lead plaintiff Rikki Held listens to testimony during a hearing in the climate change lawsuit, Held vs. Montana, at the Lewis and Clark County Courthouse on, June 20, 2023, in Helena, Mont. A Montana judge on Monday, Aug. 14, sided with young environmental activists who said state agencies were violating their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment by permitting fossil fuel development without considering its effect on the climate. (Thom Bridge/Independent Record via AP, File)

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of 2 | FILE - Youth plaintiffs in the climate change lawsuit, *Held vs. Montana*, arrive at the Lewis and Clark County Courthouse, on June 20, 2023, in Helena, Mont., for the final day of the trial. A Montana judge on Monday, Aug. 14, sided with young environmental activists who said state agencies were violating their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment by permitting fossil fuel development without considering its effect on the climate. (Thom Bridge/Independent Record via AP, File)

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HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Young environmental activists scored what experts described as a ground-breaking legal victory Monday when a Montana judge said state agencies were violating their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment by allowing fossil fuel development.

The ruling in this first-of-its-kind trial in the U.S. adds to a small number of legal decisions around the world that have established a government duty to protect citizens from climate change.

If it stands, the ruling could set an important legal precedent, though experts said the immediate impacts are limited and state officials pledged to seek to overturn the decision on appeal.

District Court Judge Kathy Seeley found the policy the state uses in evaluating requests for fossil fuel permits — which does not allow agencies to look at greenhouse gas emissions — is unconstitutional.