

New state officers bring humor, passion to Calif. FFA

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

FRESNO, Calif. — California FFA's newly elected state officer team promised the more than 5,000 students attending the organization's state convention that they'll put plenty of passion and energy into the coming year.

The slate of new officers announced April 26 includes the first-ever twins to serve together at the state level — President Andrew Skidmore and Secretary Amanda Skidmore, both from the small San Joaquin Valley town of Atwater.

During his election pitch to delegates, Andrew generated laughs — and a few gasps — by comparing his candidacy to the TV show, "The Bachelor." He told the gathering that "just like those roses," he may sometimes have a thorny side "but I'm beautiful."

Amanda showed some humor, too, telling fellow members that doctors had said she would be a boy and her stubborn parents dubbed her "a man, duh."

"I've been called a tomboy and a lady," Amanda told more than 5,000 students in Fresno's Selland Arena, adding that she would bring the best of both perspectives into her leadership role. "I will serve this organization with motivation, passion and determination."

The Skidmore siblings are joined on the 2016-17 officers' team by Vice President Lauren Millang of Woodland, Treasurer Sam Looper of Apple Valley, Reporter Conner Vernon of Nipomo and Sentinel Jace Neugebauer of McArthur. The students were among 81 applicants for state office, 37 of whom were given interviews and 12 chosen as finalists.

Looper also took a humorous approach to his April 25 election pitch, making light of what he called his "plus-size" jacket. He said his friends call him "Corn Fed" and that he's "full of GMOs."

"In the last four years, I've not only grown out of eight FFA jackets but I've grown as a leader," Looper said to laughter and loud cheers.

The new officers were announced after each of the outgoing state officers had taken turns over the course of the April 21-26 conference in giving heartfelt speeches about their time in office. Each also had their parents



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

From left, newly elected California FFA state officers Andrew Skidmore, president; Sam Looper, treasurer; Lauren Millang, vice president; Amanda Skidmore, secretary; Conner Vernon, reporter; and Jace Neugebauer, sentinel, stand near a limousine that will take them to their first meeting. The naming of the new officers concluded the organization's 88th annual convention in Fresno.

and advisers on stage to thank them in moving tributes.

Outgoing President Joelle Lewis of San Luis Obispo themed her address "environmental change," noting that students' "roots" help form their interests and beliefs but they're capable of improving their own outlook.

"We may be products of our environment, but we have a responsibility ... to choose who we are," Lewis said. She added that supporters and detractors "don't decide who you are — you do."

Sydney Sousa of Tulare, the outgoing vice president, urged fellow members to practice selflessness, noting that the virtue will help them in a sometimes thankless career of farming. She told of putting together boxes of clothes and other items for the FFA chapter in El Reno, Okla., which was devastated by a 2013 tornado, and later being approached and thanked at the national FFA convention in Louisville, Ky.

"Know the power of doing something for someone and expecting nothing in return," Sousa said.

Lewis and Sousa were joined by their fellow 2015-2016 officers — Secretary Breanna Holbert of Lodi, Treasurer Trevor Autry of Nipomo, Reporter Danielle Diele of Merced and Sentinel Tim Truax of Turlock — in ceremonially retiring their trusty blue-and-gold jackets amid wild cheers and tearful embraces.

The conference also featured 2015-16 National FFA President Taylor McNeel of Vilonia, Ark., and 2015-16 national Secretary



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A greater sage grouse is shown in this file photo. Federal agencies have restricted mineral exploration and development on more than 10 million acres of federal land in California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Utah and Wyoming to protect the bird, prompting a federal lawsuit.

Miners sue over sage grouse land lockup

SPOKANE, Wash. — The American Exploration & Mining Association, in Spokane, has filed a lawsuit in federal district court in Washington, D.C., challenging federal restrictions on mineral exploration and development in Western states.

Allegedly to protect sage grouse, federal agencies have restricted mineral exploration and development on more than 10 million acres of federal land in California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Montana,

Utah and Wyoming.

The association, formerly the Northwest Mining Association and represented by Mountain States Legal Foundation, Denver, filed suit April 19 alleging federal agencies lack authority to withdraw the land from operation of the General Mining Law of 1872 and failed to provide for adequate public participation in the process by which federal land use planning documents are amended and revised.

In September of 2015, the

Obama administration announced that it would not list the sage grouse as endangered but nonetheless declared it will withdraw highly mineralized lands from public use, said William Perry Pendley, MSLF president.

"Obama officials tell the West it will not list the sage grouse but then stealthily closes federal land that has been opened for mining for decades and devastates our economies," Pendley said.

— Dan Wheat



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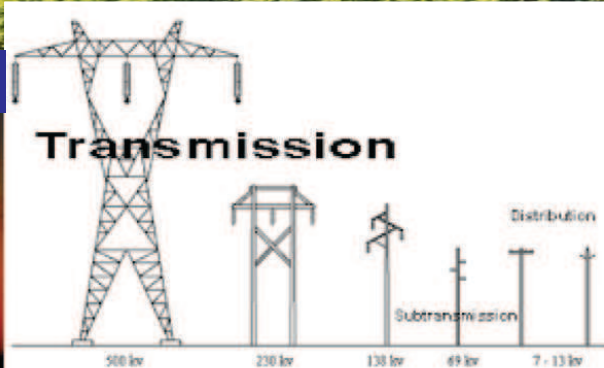
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