

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Zapata County Fire and EMS increases capacity with converted military vehicle and new apparatus

**April 3, 2017 — Zapata, Texas** — The Zapata County Fire and EMS received a 5-ton cargo truck and a \$20,000 grant to help create a firefighting vehicle that will help increase the department's capacity to save lives and property.

"This truck is vital to the Zapata County Fire & EMS," said Texas A&M Forest Service Regional Fire Coordinator Travis Pecht. "Their mutual aid department is 40 miles away which means response takes valuable time when traveling so far. This 5-ton truck and slip-on unit will be crucial to containing grass fires and protecting homes."

Zapata County Fire and EMS has been serving their community and surrounding area since 1950. The department's protection area covers a 1,003 square miles, 800 of those miles are sandy and covered in brush. The addition of an excess military vehicle with a slip-on unit will help to give the department an upper hand over wildland fires.

"This military truck allows us to get out into areas without getting stuck in the sandy terrain," said Zapata County Fire and EMS Fire Chief Juan Jose Meza. "The truck has four-wheel-drive and is automatic, an improvement over the standard transmission that is more work for the firefighter, with the clutch and constant shifting."

The acquisition of the truck was made possible through the Department of Defense Firefighter Property Program and the grant for the slip-on unit was received through the Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Grant Program, both administered by Texas A&M Forest Service.

"Last year we had three very large fires," said Meza. "They covered 1,000, 4,500, and 4,000 acres. We had to fight those fires with only one truck plus firefighters on the ground. Having the option to have this additional apparatus with a 1,000-gallon water tank gives us the ability to be better prepared for a quicker knock-down. We recently responded to a mutual aid call that was a 400-acre fire on the Webb County line. We took care of that fire pretty quickly with the aid of this truck."

The DoD Firefighter Property Program, overseen by the USDA Forest Service, provides excess military equipment to fire departments and emergency service providers. Launched in Texas in 2005, this program has released over 400 retired military trucks to VFDs across the state. Texas A&M Forest Service transports the vehicle from a military installation, performs necessary repairs and delivers it to the volunteer fire department at no cost to them.

Texas A&M Forest Service is committed to protecting lives and property through its various fire department assistance programs. For more information on programs offered by Texas A&M Forest Service, please visit <http://texasfd.com>.

