

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 3, 2017**

**Rio Hondo VFD converts military vehicle into a firefighting machine**

**April 3, 2017 — Rio Hondo, Texas** — Rio Hondo Volunteer Fire Department received an excess military Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck (HEMTT) through the Department of Defense Firefighter Property Program administered by Texas A&M Forest Service.

Rio Hondo VFD protects the town of Rio Hondo and the third largest citrus and vegetable producers in the United States. This truck will help increase their capacity to fill that role.

“Our protection area is 210-square-miles with a lot of rural farm land,” said Rio Hondo VFD Fire Chief William Bilokury. “The truck came to us mechanically sound and is a very valuable asset because we now have the capability to go into areas that use to be difficult to reach.”

The apparatus was painted a non-military color and configured as a large brush truck designed for wildland fire operations. The slip-on unit with a 1400-gallon tank is mounted in the cargo area. Other additions include a large cargo compartment, 360-degree flood/scene lighting, a crew work area and crew safety harnesses.

The eight-wheel-drive increases the firefighter’s capability to go where the smaller brush trucks cannot go, allowing the department to provide a vital water supply for their own responses and mutual aid.

“We will be using this truck as a multipurpose vehicle,” said Bilokury. “The truck’s ruggedness will support wildland firefighting and structure fires. The height of the truck will allow it to easily maneuver flood water. Our community is in a flood plain and high water rescues can become necessary.”

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 to help them better protect lives and property. 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.

For more information on programs offered by Texas A&M Forest Service, please visit <http://texasfd.com>.



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