

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Utopia VFD receives \$15,000 grant

May 3, 2016 — UTOPIA, Texas — Utopia Volunteer Fire Department recently received a \$15,000 grant to purchase rescue equipment through Texas A&M Forest Service's Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program.

With a service area of 314 square miles that includes two state parks, the rescue equipment, which includes a thermal imaging camera increases the department's capacity to serve the community.

"Our department has extensive training and capabilities in search and rescue. We respond to calls involving lost individuals and injured hikers," Utopia VFD Chief James O'Bryant said. "We average about five rescues a summer but have had as many as 23. The camera will be able to scan the whole hillside and detect the body heat of an individual, allowing us to rescue them."

Texas A&M Forest Service Regional Fire Coordinator Gabriel Mahlum explained, "[The camera] is particularly effective in identifying body heat, where people are trapped and where first responders are unable to find them. This equipment can also be applied during wildland fire operations to detect hotspot locations."

Texas A&M Forest Service is committed to protecting lives and property through the Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program, a cost-share program funded by the Texas State Legislature and administered by Texas A&M Forest Service. This program provides funding to rural VFDs for the acquisition of firefighting vehicles, fire and rescue equipment, protective clothing, dry-hydrants, computer systems and firefighter training.

To learn more about this and other programs offered by Texas A&M Forest Service, visit <http://texasfd.com>.

