Texas Forest Service will implement the following changes to the Rural VFD Assistance Program (HB 2604) in FY 2012.

- The Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program still exists. It was retained and continued by the 82nd Texas legislature. However, because of the state budget crisis, the legislature reduced spending authority for the program for the next two years. Beginning September 1, 2011, the annual grant budget for the program will be $7.0 million (it had been $23 million the previous year).

- Because of the reduced spending authority, the Texas Forest Service has made the decision to focus the limited funds on grant categories that prominently emphasize firefighter safety. For that reason, highest priority will be given to grants for Training Tuition and PPE in fiscal year 2012.

- The Texas Forest Service will continue to accept and approve grant applications in the following categories:
  - Training Tuition
  - Training Libraries
  - Electronic Projectors
  - Structural PPE
  - Wildland PPE
  - Fire Equipment
  - Rescue Equipment

- The Texas Forest Service will accept applications for Emergency Grants to replace fire trucks that are destroyed by fire or that are destroyed in a vehicle accident. A limited amount of funds will be available in this grant category. Applications for emergency grants will be approved only on a case-by-case basis following an on-site assessment conducted by a TFS agent.

- The Texas Forest Service will continue to accept applications for first fire trucks. Applications for first fire trucks will be reviewed and approved only at the year-end Funding Meeting, usually held in July of each year. Approval of fire truck applications is subject to the availability of funds at year end.

- Thermal Imaging Cameras will now be eligible for grant assistance in the Rescue Equipment category.

- The Texas Forest Service will continue to accept applications for first computers.

- Grant assistance will be offered for a fire department’s cost-share portion of a FEMA apparatus grant. This offering will be launched sometime in calendar year 2012. Grant funds will be limited.

- The Texas Forest Service is required by law to modify its fire department rating system to include threat of wildfire risk. TFS will initiate a statewide survey in 2012 to obtain stakeholder input on how wildfire risk should be weighted and implemented.

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