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Two firefighters hospitalized after prescribed burn

Published: Friday, March 10th 2017, 3:08 pm MST

Updated: Friday, March 10th 2017, 3:32 pm MST

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DONLEY COUNTY, TX (KFDA) -

Firefighter Clay Lozier and Chief Bob Watson from Borger were airlifted to a Lubbock hospital after a prescribed burn got out of hand Thursday.

Crews working on the JA Ranch in Donley County had everything under control until a juniper tree was torched and sent embers outside the controlled area.

The second fire was nearly contained when an extremely rare phenomenon called a fire-whirl caused it to get out of control.

"A fire whirl is essentially a tornado with fire in it," said JA Ranch owner Andrew Bivins. "It threw fire 30 yards in every direction."

The fire whirl burned two firefighters on their hands and face.

Despite the injuries, officials who approved the prescribed burn say yesterday's actions helped avoid a potential disaster.

"Prescribed burning is such an important practice not only for brush control but also for wildfire mitigation," said Bivins. "If a wildfire had come through this ranch, Clarendon would have burned up. By removing the fuel, we are protecting the municipalities."

Under state law agriculture practices such as a prescribed burn are exempt from a burn ban.

Therefore, despite the burn bans in Donley and Armstrong counties, yesterday's actions were legal.