

# Wildlife Fertility Control in the U.S. National Park Service – Does it Make Sense?

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Wildlife fertility control is one of the most socio-politically complex wildlife management tools to have been applied to free-ranging wildlife. Many advances have been made to address the technical and biological challenges of fertility control. However, the idea that fertility control methods will be embraced as a tool for wildlife management once methodological hurdles have been solved may be unrealistic. In large part, state and federal wildlife management agencies, who are the principle end users of these technologies, have not been engaged in conversations surrounding wildlife fertility control in large part because these methods are perceived as inconsistent with their mission, goals, or policies for wildlife management. While the National Park Service (NPS) policies are permissive of reproductive interventions and a few individual parks have used fertility control in both research and management contexts, until recently there has not been a Service-wide discussion about when and under what circumstances to apply wildlife fertility control in NPS units. In 2012 the NPS initiated a Service-wide dialogue surrounding when and in what context fertility control may be appropriate in ungulates managed within the national park system. The resulting report was published in 2015 and gives guidance for parks considering fertility control as an ungulate management technique. Outcomes revealed that NPS managers are most likely to use fertility control in small, geographically limited populations of non-native ungulates. These techniques are least appropriate in relatively large intact ecosystems. Further, it is imperative to consider co-management responsibilities and decision making when populations span across multiple jurisdictions and in particular the laws and policies of the states involved. Overall, prospects for application of fertility control to manage ungulate populations in national parks are sparse.