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Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
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Oversight Hearing on Encouraging the Next Generation to Visit National Parks.

Good afternoon Chairman Daines, Ranking Member Hirono, and other members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss how technology can help enhance the visitor experience and encourage the next generation to enjoy our federal recreation lands and waters.

My name is Angela Fultz Nordstrom, and I am the Vice President of Federal for NIC. NIC is one of the nation's leading providers of digital government services and secure payment processing solutions. We partner with government agencies to make it faster and easier for citizens and businesses to interact with government. We combine proven technology with innovative contracting methods to deliver digital solutions. These solutions allow agencies to dedicate more time and resources to their missions while minimizing government risk, cost, and oversight requirements. More information about our experience and contracting methods is available at www.egov.com.

I commend the Subcommittee for examining how government can encourage the next generation to visit the National Parks. As a native Montanan who grew up with the jewels of Glacier and Yellowstone National Park just a quick drive away, I appreciated these tremendous public lands that were available to me. And back then, every aspect of planning and visiting a National Park – from researching the best times of year to visit, to finding the fastest driving route, researching in-property activities and purchasing the entry pass – was all done offline, without the benefit of today's technology.

Today, when I look at the suburban Nashville lifestyle of my own children, who always seem to have a phone or tablet in their hand or within arm's reach, I wonder how I can ensure they have the same level of respect and appreciation for our National Parks. I am committed to raising children who will share my sense of awe, responsibility, and stewardship for these incredible places.

In 2015, with the support and urging of many members of this committee, the National Park Service set out to find ways to engage with the next generation of park visitors, by making it easier for them to enter a National Park.

In December of that same year, NIC was honored and excited to be one of three companies chosen for the National Park Service ePass pilot program. Just eight weeks later, Acadia National Park became the first National Park to accept an electronic park

pass using the YourPassNow solution. In March 2016, Colorado National Monument and Theodore Roosevelt National Park followed. Today, I am pleased to share with you the results of the YourPassNow solution, as part of the National Park Service model program.

As members of the committee may recall, the National Park Service ePass pilot came about at the urging of U.S. Senators Angus King and Susan Collins of Maine. Their vision was to make electronic entrance passes available at Acadia National Park. They recognized digital park passes would make it easier for people to visit and enjoy our most treasured places, as well as help the Park Service maximize sales and generate new revenues that could be reinvested in maintaining the properties.

Through the guidance of the National Park Service and the leadership in each facility, YourPassNow has expanded to include Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and Castillo de San Marcos National Monument. Seeing a need to be filled, the U.S. Forest Service also joined the pilot and entered into an inter-agency agreement with the National Park Service. Today, the U.S. Forest Service uses YourPassNow to provide passes and permits for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and Wayne National Forest.

With every use of YourPassNow, the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service are making it easier for people to visit public lands. A typical YourPassNow transaction takes about 90 seconds to complete, it generates a digital bar code that can be kept on a personal mobile device or printed out and placed in a vehicle. It can also be scanned by a park ranger to confirm its validity.

By all accounts, the National Park Service pilot has been a success and the agencies should be commended for their efforts. The objective of the pilot was to test the premise that people were open to purchasing digital park passes. The answer to this question is *absolutely, yes*. In the first nine months of 2017, the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service combined have issued nearly 22,000 passes through YourPassNow across seven public lands. This is two and half times greater than the number sold in all of 2016. The same holds true for the first park, Acadia, which has experienced a 57% increase in electronic pass sales from 2016 to 2017.

We also know the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service have made it easier for the next generation to visit National Parks and public lands. Anecdotally, we have heard from gate entry personnel that those using YourPassNow and presenting digital park passes are younger in age – and includes many Millennials.

Examples of the pilot's success to improve access don't stop there. When the National Park Service announced the price of the Lifetime Senior Pass was increasing, they saw a tremendous surge in purchase requests. Through their leadership, and in just two weeks, YourPassNow was enhanced to support the online sales of the America the Beautiful – Lifetime Senior Pass. In fact, during a 32-day period from July 27 through August 27, YourPassNow processed 635,000 Senior Passes, with 90,000 purchased in one day alone.

We received an email from a couple who purchased a Senior Pass using YourPassNow that really brought it home for me. Sara and Ray Twining, who own a dairy farm in Wellington, Ohio, shared the following with us: “Thank you so much for the opportunity to see some of the great places in America. We recently retired from milking cows for the past 50 years. Our dream has long been to have the freedom to see our country. Thanks for doing your part.”

In addition, YourPassNow has also uncovered areas for the National Parks to generate extra revenue. Acadia has shared that the park is generating more revenue in the off season than they have in the past. They believe this increase in off-season revenue is due to visitors purchasing passes through YourPassNow in advance of their travel. We have also heard the park is generating additional revenue from visitors who purchased an electronic pass when they were unable to leave cash or checks when entering through unmanned entrance stations and trailheads.

At NIC, we firmly believe technology can enable and encourage the next generation to make meaningful, lifelong connections with our National Parks. We are proud to partner with the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service to deliver YourPassNow. This is just one way NIC is using technology to help make outdoor and government operations more efficient and easier to use. In states ranging from Hawaii to Maine, Montana to Wisconsin, we build digital services that make the process of obtaining those camping, hunting, fishing, and park entry permits as easy as sending a text. In addition, these digital transactions reduce the administrative burden for agency staff allowing them to spend more time interacting with visitors and providing essential services that keep our public lands operational. Again, technology goes hand-in-hand with enhancing the experience of our national parks and public lands.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, the National Park Service ePass pilot program has been a great success, and the agency should be applauded for their vision and leadership. As the results of their pilot demonstrate, current and future generations will use digital park entry passes to make it easier to access public lands. We are excited to support the National Park Service in their next great idea as they look for ways to use technology to make it easier for everyone to engage with federal recreational lands and waterways.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important pilot program. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.