TESTIMONY

of

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before the

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"ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION TO VISIT NATIONAL PARKS"

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hirono, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Yennie Solheim Fuller, and I am Civic and Social Impact Manager of Niantic, Inc., which is headquartered in San Francisco, California. On behalf of the dedicated and innovative professionals at Niantic, as well as the millions of users who play our games around the world every day, it is an honor to be here today to talk about how the core technology we use in our games – Augmented Reality or AR – can help encourage "the next generation" to visit and enjoy our national parks, whether they be serene urban oases, historic sites, or majestic open lands.

While you may not previously have heard anything about Niantic, I suspect you know about our games, particularly Pokémon GO. We at Niantic were surprised and humbled at the extraordinary global response when Pokémon GO launched last year. What we experienced far exceeded our own imaginations. Since July 2016, the app has been downloaded over 750 million times, and is enjoyed by users in this country and countries around the world.

We are particularly proud that Pokémon GO, as well as our earlier AR game, Ingress, have together helped stir the world's attention and imagination to the enormous potential of AR as an educational and exploration tool. More fundamentally, we've been excited at how our games get people moving. Even now, we continue to hear stories about people getting outside, spending time with their friends and family, meeting new people and discovering new places in their communities and across the country, including at our national parks and monuments.

These stories speak to our core mission: to use technology to get people outside to appreciate the wonder of the world around us. In fact, technology, if used smartly, can help bring people to our national parks, particularly young people and others who have not historically been drawn to these amazing, diverse, and dynamic places.

It's important to clarify just what it is we at Niantic do to enhance, or dare I say augment, the experiences we have outside. Simply put, we use existing mobile technology to add a new dimension to the experience of simply getting out and

about. A brief history of Niantic's mobile apps and games will help illustrate this point:

Niantic's first mobile app, "Field Trip," links to a number of educational databases and uses Global Positioning System technology to deliver historic and other interesting points of knowledge about a user's immediate surroundings. It could be anything ranging from local history, interesting landmarks, and works of art and architecture.

If we were standing in front of the Transamerica Building in San Francisco, Field Trip would show a marker with the origin of our company name: the whaling ship, *Niantic*, which brought fortune-seekers to San Francisco during the California Gold Rush in 1849. Run aground in the harbor and abandoned by its crew, the *Niantic* was converted into a storeship and hotel that would repeatedly catch fire and be rebuilt. As a Field Trip player would learn, today's San Francisco Financial District, located where a harbor once stood, is where the Niantic first ran aground, and remnants of the ship were excavated at the foot of the Transamerica Building in 1978. We believe the *Niantic* serves as a wonderful metaphor for hidden stories: The knowledge exists – it just may not be always available or visible to us.

Building off of Field Trip's objective – to help users discover interesting information about places around them – we developed in 2012 our first mobile augmented reality game, Ingress. With Ingress, we combined gaming, walking, and exploring. Today, the Ingress community is amazing, and continues to grow with more than one million active players in 4,000 communities worldwide.

The game is centered largely on Ingress players discovering Portals, which are found in publicly accessible areas. In addition to being important to Ingress gameplay, the Portals also provide interesting information about their locations, such as statues and monuments, unique architecture, outdoor murals, historic buildings, and unique local businesses.

The popularity of Ingress among the gaming community, particularly in Japan, gave rise to the notion of combining the long-cherished Pokémon franchise with maps and AR technology.

As depicted in Pokémon Go, the player – called a "Trainer" – goes out into the world searching for and capturing Pokémon. Through your device – your phone today and perhaps some kind of glasses or other devices in the future – you become the Trainer and can see this fantastical world of Pokémon overlaid on the real world, whether that's the National Mall here in Washington, Haleakala National Park in Hawaii, or the Many Glacier Hotel in Glacier National Park, Montana.

It's worth sharing briefly how we decided on the locations of the millions of PokéStops and Gyms, which are markers in the game that correspond to a landmark or other place of interest. Many historical markers and other local landmarks from our first app, Field Trip, became significant game locations in Ingress. When we were developing Pokémon GO, we asked Ingress players to submit ideas for local landmarks they thought would be great additions to Pokémon GO; millions of places were suggested, and a subset of those submissions was added to the existing set of points of interest to populate PokéStops and Gyms in Pokémon GO.

Many of those points of interest are in or around our great national parks. That's why it's no surprise that a byproduct of the game's popularity is increased park visitation, including people, young and old, who hadn't previously set foot in a national park.

As we understand, the National Park Service informed your Committee that some of its parks had seen a welcomed increase in visitation because of Pokémon GO. We are heartened to hear of this because it's exactly why we created Ingress and Pokémon GO: To get people outside, to explore and learn about the world around them, and to visit interesting places that they wouldn't otherwise go see.

Just like Ingress, Pokémon GO provides information about where a PokéStop or Gym is located. For example, a Pokémon GO player who discovers the PokéStop at the Many Glacier Hotel in Glacier, Montana, will learn from the text box that accompanies the PokéStop that the hotel was part of a network of chalets that were built a day's horseback ride apart, which enabled guests to cross the park's wild, roadless interior while spending nights in relative comfort and security.

Similar bits of interesting information and history can be found at PokéStops at Yellowstone, Haleakala, and other national parks and landmarks across our great country.

As an aside, we at Niantic have followed with interest and concern the recent wildfire at Glacier National Park, and the loss of the Sperry Chalet, in the Chairman's great state of Montana. Mr. Chairman, we would be happy to work with you, and the National Park Service, to engage with the community in the funding and rebuilding effort. This is something we've done before with Ingress, using the game as a community organizing tool to help people reinvigorate and revitalize areas hit by disasters.

While we are excited about the use of our games as a tool to encourage exploration of our national parks, we are also mindful that all of us are only temporary stewards of this land, which is why we must do our part to help preserve our parks for future generations. For this reason, we created "Operation Clear Field" – a program that combines Ingress game play with light cleanup in 106 city, state, and national parks across the United States. Through "Operation Clear Field," we also enable gamers to contribute to the National Park Foundation (NPF). To date, I'm proud to report we've collected over $60,000 for the NPF.

As we continue to offer Ingress and Pokémon GO, and as we look ahead to the next additions to and advancements in AR gameplay, we look forward to coming up with other programs that both get "the next generation" to explore the wonder of our national parks and help them see these public lands for what they truly are: special places that belong to all of us.

Mr. Chairman, thank you and your Subcommittee colleagues again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.