Memorandum

To: Professor Arthur Thomas, Metropolitan State University of Denver
From: Nate Roberts, Student <robernat@msudenver.edu>
Date: 11th November, 2018
Subject: *Podcast Analysis*

Per your specifications for the assignment, I listened to an episode of a weekly science and technology podcast produced by The Wall Street Journal called "The Future of Everything". The particular episode I chose is entitled "The De-Extinction Movement Comes to Life". It was published on October 10th, 2018, has a run time of 15 minutes, and is available for download at: *https://traffic.megaphone.fm/WSJ2982589262.mp3*.

The podcast concerns itself with one particular use of the gene-editing technology CRISPR – altering the DNA of modern animals in order to revive extinct species to whom they are related. It focuses on the efforts of scientists and conservationists to restore one particular bird species, the Passenger Pigeon, that was hunted to extinction in North America in the early twentieth century. The host begins by acknowledging some of the practical and philosophical questions about such an endeavor, then proceeds to a conversation with one of the conservationists involved in the project about the history and significance of the birds. This effectively serves to bring the audience on board with why it might be desirable to restore a species that many modern Americans know only in relation to today's urban pigeons, often thought of as pests.

The discussion continues with a geneticist who discusses some of the technical details of the "de-extinction" process and the CRISPR technology. She does a good job rendering the complex scientific details comprehensible to a general audience, though perhaps at the expense of too many details – CRISPR is essentially characterized as "a guide and a pair of molecular scissors", which does get the general idea across, but misses some of the fascinating subtleties of how the technology works. This is an understandable choice given the show's time constraints and ley audience, but a bit deeper of a dive would not have gone amiss.

Overall, I found the structure of the podcast very effective. The progression of ideas made sense, and did a good job of using a specific project to describe the technicalities and issues of a broader scientific question. The program seems clearly geared towards an audience with an interest, but little to no formal training, in the sciences, and as such, it serves its purpose well. It provides enough information to understand the subject without overwhelming the listener with details, though here again, links to deeper explorations or "suggested readings" on the topic might be of great interest to their audience.

Because of its lack of scientific detail, the program would likely offer little of interest to scientists active in the fields it discusses, but effectively whets the appetite of a general audience with a curiosity about, in this case, modern genetic research. I found it engaging, and will likely listen further, as the podcast changes its specific topic each week.