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A game to help stakeholders explore trade-offs in marine spatial planning

By John B. Davis

We often think of games as simply a form of entertainment. But they can play an important role in teaching, too. By applying an aspect of fun to education, games can help communicate messages in ways that pure instruction sometimes cannot.

I'm preparing an article for the next issue of *Marine Ecosystems and Management (MEAM)* on how games can help practitioners and the public explore different aspects of ocean planning. It turns out there are several such games available, including a few that have been applied — and had real impacts — during actual planning processes. Here is a snippet from the forthcoming article:

The board game "Trade-Off!", developed in 2008, aims to prepare coastal stakeholders for marine spatial planning processes. It highlights the types of decisions that are typically made during spatial planning, such as where to site compatible activities and how to separate conflicting uses. Players must negotiate these decisions while assuming the roles of various stakeholder groups — compelling them to consider the situation from points of view beyond their own. The game was designed by SeaWeb, an environmental NGO, in collaboration with the Integration and Application Network at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science in the US.

"Trade-Off!" helps participants recognize that marine spatial planning rarely gets to build on a 'clean slate,' says Kathleen Reaugh Flower, who led the game design process at SeaWeb. "You must consider complementary activities in your plan, and compromises need to be made between stakeholders."

The game has been used in association with real marine spatial planning efforts around the world, says Daria Siciliano, who now oversees "Trade-Off!" for SeaWeb. She says that players typically exhibit an unwillingness at first to make concessions, but peer pressure from other affected players/stakeholders often spurs more accommodating solutions. "This could be analogous to what happens in real-life discussions," says Siciliano. More information on the game is at www.seaweb.org/resources/ebm/SeaWebsEBMCommunicationsProject.php.

The next issue of MEAM, June-July 2012, will be released around 15 June.

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