MAPPING OUT A PLAN: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING, AND THE POWER OF PLACE

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The island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is renowned worldwide for its natural beauty and abundant coastal and marine resources. The clear waters surrounding the island offer opportunities for a wide variety of recreational and commercial activities; from parasailing or SCUBA diving to commercial and subsistence fishing. One area where all of these competing uses and stakeholders come together is the Saipan Lagoon, a shallow inter-reef area stretching over most of the 12 mile long island's western coastline. The lagoon encompasses most of the shoreline development on the island and is heavily used for a variety of recreational and commercial activities such as jet skiing, banana boating, swimming, parasailing, kite boarding, outrigger paddling, fishing, and SCUBA diving. The lagoon also has significant cultural and historical significance.

In recent years, tourism to Saipan has increased dramatically, with over 400,000 tourists visiting Saipan in 2014. On an island with a population of less than 50,000 permanent residents, this boom in tourism has resulted in a surge in commercial marine sports operations and a rise in user conflicts in the lagoon area. To address this issue, the Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM), the CNMI's coastal management agency, conducted an extensive lagoon user survey to assess and evaluate the uses and potential conflicts within the lagoon. To do so, DCRM employed key principles of marine spatial planning and used mapping tools such as participatory mapping and map- based surveys to help determine where in the lagoon stakeholders are active, what activities they are engaged in and where those activities compete for space or may negatively impact the lagoon itself.

In this session, you will learn about the different tools that were implemented, and you will see how the collected data will contribute to the resulting lagoon management plan. Lessons learned and best practices will be discussed, and the efficacy of these methods will be compared to previous lagoon management plans where they were not used.