

Pearl River, Negotiating the Future of Dams: A Science-Based Role Play Simulation for Engaged Decision Making

This role-play simulation workshop invites you to participate in active learning and discussions about making decisions about dammed river systems and, more broadly, about how we make decisions to steward natural resources. The Pearl River is a facilitated, multi-issue negotiation simulation about the management of five dams in the fictional Pearl River basin, which is based on actual dam situations in the New England region of the USA (Diessner et al., 2020). Role-play negotiations, also called serious games or policy games, are used across a range of environmental policy contexts for education and outreach, to influence policy, and for research. The workshop includes an introduction, a short time to prepare (preparatory information will be provided in advance to registered participants), small group negotiations, a “debriefing” discussion about participants’ experiences with the simulation and its relevance to their own contexts and interests, and reflections from using role-play workshops in different settings.

The workshop takes place on **Friday, 8 December, from 09:00–12:00** at the Rachel Carson Center in the **fourth-floor conference room**. (Please note: This workshop has been moved from 17 November, 10:00–13:00, due to illness.)

To register: Please RSVP for the Pearl River workshop by email to catherine.ashcraft@unh.edu with “Pearl River Workshop” in the subject. Preparatory information will be sent to registered participants in advance of the workshop. Additional workshop information is below.

The main task of the Pearl River simulation is for a small group of interested and affected parties to negotiate a plan for a river system, including which dam management alternatives (removal, improved fish passage, new hydropower capacity, dam repair) they want to consider, which dams they want to focus on, who will implement the plan, and who will pay to implement the plan. Participants have access to a web-based system dynamics model application, which simulates environmental and economic outcomes under different dam management alternatives for the Pearl River. Key lessons include: (1) dammed river systems are linked social, physical, and ecological systems, which have feedbacks over spatial and temporal scales, many stakeholders, overlapping legal and procedural frameworks, and scientific uncertainty, and (2) dam decisions should be informed by credible, trusted information about the likely impacts of decisions, such as how the decision to focus on one dam or a series of dams affects outcomes.

The workshop will be led by Dr. Catherine Ashcraft, associate professor of environmental policy and planning in the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of New Hampshire, USA, and alumni fellow at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. For questions or further information, please email catherine.ashcraft@unh.edu.