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## It's time to institute Rhode Island Population Measure

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Another view

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Journalists keen to put the size of Texas cattle ranches or arctic ice shelves into perspective often employ the RISM, or Rhode Island Standard Measure. You know, the refugee camp is "half the size of Rhode Island." This makes perfect sense for Rhode Islanders, who use such figures to do their own kind of math, "half Rhode Island's size . . . that's four times farther than I'm willing to drive!" but it doesn't work nationally. Most Americans are hazy on the Rhode Island concept - some think the whole state is an island (not an absurd supposition, actually), while others confuse Rhode Island with Long Island. Telling an Arizonan that a European Duchy is two-thirds the size of Rhode Island isn't providing context, it's just substituting one far flung obscurity for another.

There's a more serious problem with the RISM - there is no agreement on Rhode Island's size. Imagine if a foot was variously reported as six inches, eight inches and twelve inches. Lack of uniformity is a lousy trait in a unit of measure. According to The World Almanac, Rhode Island is 1,545 square miles; the State of Rhode Island pegs it at 1,214 square miles and the US Census Bureau 1,045 square miles. So who is right? Everybody and nobody. It all depends on whether Narragansett Bay and inland water is included in the calculation. The upshot is that for accuracy's sake, one should specify which measure is being used, although that could get cumbersome: "The flooded area is threequarters the size of Rhode Island, if the Rhode Island figure used includes inland water, but excludes Narragansett Bay."

The RISM isn't getting the job done, and we'd do well to scrap it. However, it's part of the Rhode Island brand, and with the trouble the state is in, we need to get the Rhode Island name out there more often, not less. Luckily, there is a substitute at hand: the Rhode Island Population Measure, or RIPM.

Rhode Island has roughly one million fifty thousand people. The population has been declining slightly the last few years, but is basically stable and not projected to change much in the foreseeable future. In other words, it's about ONE MILLION PEOPLE.

This is a magic number - everybody understands it, and it's easy to work with. Let's try some examples: the borough of Queens, New York has a population of 2.3 million people, more than double that of the state of Rhode Island.

Or how about this: Michigan's rugged Upper Peninsula has barely 300,000 people, not even a third of Rhode Island's population, or, last one, 250,000 people, a quarter the population of Rhode Island, have been affected by the flooding.

Let's not delay, as we have on so many other needed changes, in implementing the Rhode Island Population Measure. I don't doubt that two other places with a million or so people, the Canadian province of Saskatchewan and the Asian nation of Timor-Leste, will jump on this if Rhode Island doesn't. We don't want to be kicking ourselves when the Saskatchewan Standard

Figure (SSF), or Timor-Leste Number (TLN) has become the go-to metric for population comparisons.

Tim Lehnert is a Cranston writer and author of the book Rhode Island 101: Everything You Wanted to Know About Rhode Island and Were Going to Ask Anyway.

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