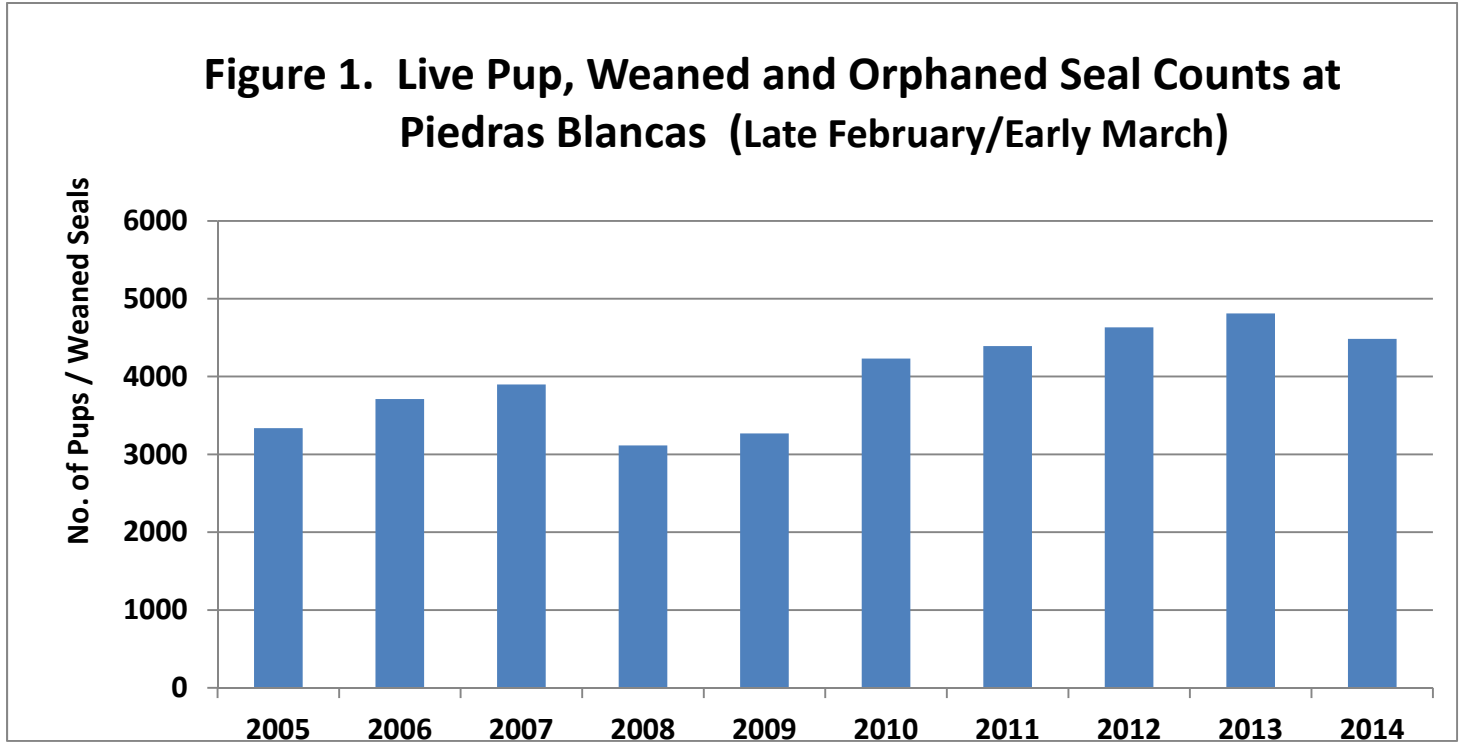


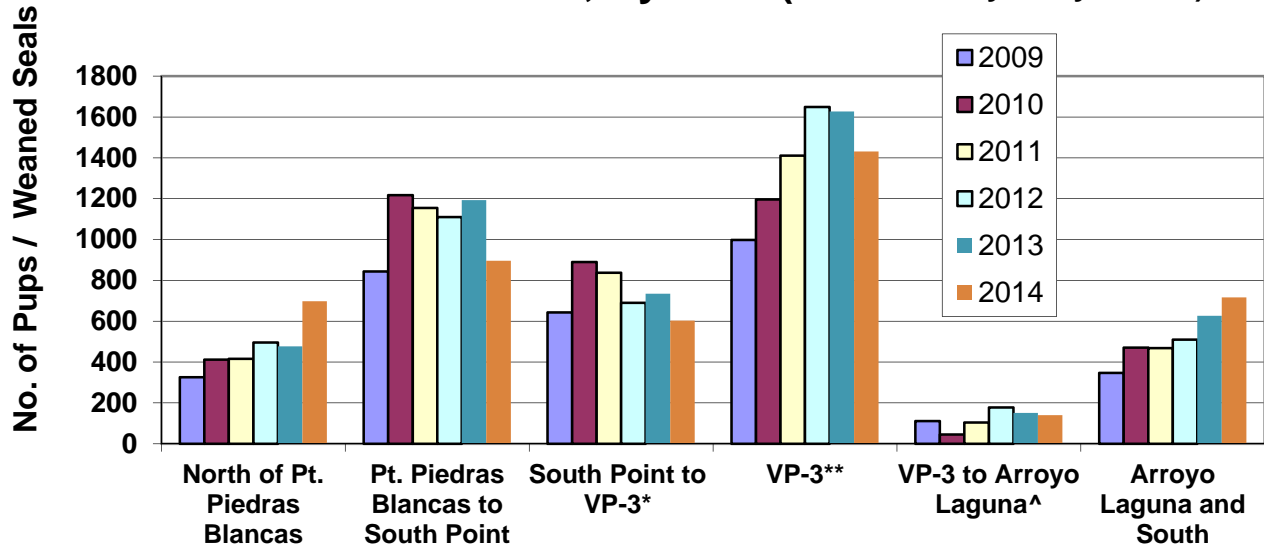
## 2014 Piedras Blancas Northern Elephant Seal Breeding Season Summary

The number of adult females at the rookery this breeding season and the number of estimated births (about 5,300 births) were up approximately 2.5% from last year. However, the number of live young-of-the-year seals counted at the end of the season (~4,500, Figure 1) was down almost 7% from last year. This indicates we had higher pup/weaner mortality this year. This is probably not a surprise to regular visitors to the rookery since there was more than the usual number of dead seals. The rookery experienced a couple of different periods of concurrent large swells and high tides this season that likely contributed to the mortality. A bit unusual this year were the numerous dead seals in good body condition (i.e., fat) with no sign of obvious trauma – some of which stranded miles from the rookery. Two of 3 fat “black coats” that stranded in San Luis County and were examined by a veterinarian from The Marine Mammal Center (Claire Simeone) exhibited evidence of internal injuries likely caused by a crushing type of event. This type of injury can be caused unintentionally to pups by large males chasing each other through harems but this can also result from large males (usually sub-adult) trying to mate with weaned seals. If this latter type of seal behavior was responsible for some of these deaths and if – I am speculating here – some occurred in shallow water where weaned seals congregate, it would be more likely that some of the dead young seals were washed out to sea (and subsequently strand on beaches away from the rookery). I would be interested to know if any docents witnessed this behavior this year.

There were declines in the number of pups/weaned seals in the more central parts of the colony (Pt. Piedras Blancas to Arroyo Laguna) and increases at both ends (Figure 2). The area north of Piedras Blancas saw the biggest increase from 2013 (about 220 seals). For the second consecutive year there were pups born north of the Piedras Blancas Motel (site). And for the first time there were pups born south of Pt. San Simeon - probably the most significant event of the 2014 breeding season.



**Figure 2. Live Pup, Weaned and Orphaned Counts at Piedras Blancas, By Area (Late February/Early March)**



\* does not include VP-3

\*\* includes cove just south of dunes

^ does not include beach at Arroyo Laguna