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Editorial: Land deal shouldn't be passed up

All the pieces are in place — almost — to acquire Wild Cherry Canyon, a spectacular stretch of coastal property that would be added to Montaña de Oro State Park.

But here's a last-minute hiccup: The Regional Water Quality Control Board, which meets today, might reallocate the \$950,000 that had been recommended for the purchase.

If that happens, The American Land Conservancy — the organization spearheading the deal — isn't sure it will be able to pull it off. That would be a shame; the conservancy has worked long and hard on this, and has managed to put together \$20 million of the \$24 million purchase price.

The water board staff had initially recommended contributing the \$950,000 toward the purchase, but with the state economy tanking, it's now advising that the money be used for other projects, including storm water management.

The money, by the way, would come from the settlement that Unocal agreed to pay to compensate for massive leaks and spills at the Guadalupe oil field.

There are many good uses for that money, and storm water management is certainly one. However, this is a rare chance to acquire a nearly pristine stretch of coastal land and preserve it for future generations. And as the water board staff points out, keeping the land in its natural state would benefit water quality.

It would be shortsighted to let this opportunity go down the drain. We urge the water board to approve the funding, and we'll put some cherry blossom bouquets on ice to celebrate when this deal is sealed.