

Special Protection Area Utility Fee Credit for Expanded Stream and Wetland Buffers

for

City of Columbia City Limits



City of Columbia

Updated 01/12/2026

Background

City of Columbia Code of Ordinances Section 21-46(c) states:

To assist in the compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, the stormwater division may develop special protection areas that require additional control of stormwater quality and quantity than provided by minimum design standards. Such areas may consist of watersheds corresponding to adopted TMDLs, known flooding problems and pollution impairments, or other areas necessary to protect, maintain, and enhance water quality and the environment of the city and the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the city. These areas can be expected to change with time as development continues and federal and state law demands.

Special Protection Area (SPA) Boundary

The Special Protection Area includes the entire City of Columbia municipal boundary.

Rationale

The City of Columbia Stream and Wetland Buffer Ordinance requires that water quality buffers of fifty feet are maintained along all US Army Corps of Engineers jurisdictional waters and non-jurisdictional wetlands. A water quality buffer is an area of original or re-established vegetation that borders streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, wetlands and seeps. Buffers are considered a “no disturb zone” along waters and wetlands identified by the USACE. Vegetation cannot be disturbed, removed or replanted unless the Storm Water Division approves a buffer restoration plan.

Water quality buffers provide numerous environmental protection and resource management benefits including:

- Restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the water resources
- Removing the pollutants delivered in urban Stormwater
- Reducing erosion and controlling sedimentation
- Stabilizing stream banks
- Providing infiltration of stormwater runoff
- Flood reduction
- Maintaining base flow of streams
- Contributing the organic matter that is a source of food and energy for the aquatic ecosystem
- Providing tree canopy to shade streams and promote desirable aquatic organisms
- Providing riparian wildlife habitat
- Furnishing scenic value and recreational opportunity.

Special Protection Area Credit Options and Requirements

In order to incentivize enhancement of water quality and these additional benefits provided by buffers, the City of Columbia offers the following utility fee credits for the impervious portion of the property located within a delineated drainage area that delivers stormwater runoff to an expanded buffer along all USACE jurisdictional waters, intermittent and perennial streams, and all wetlands as follows:

Option A

A 15% stormwater utility fee discount is provided for the impervious portion of a property located within a delineated drainage area that drains to an approved buffer with a width of at least one hundred

(100) feet, meeting the requirements described below. This buffer may be averaged according to the following criteria:

1. Buffer averaging is required for water quality buffers that have stream crossings,
2. An overall average buffer width of one hundred (100) feet must be achieved within the boundaries of the drainage area of the portion of the property to be credited,
3. The average width must be calculated based upon the entire length of the feature that is being buffered,
4. Buffer averaging shall be applied to each side of the feature independently. If the property being developed includes both sides of the feature, buffer averaging can be applied to both sides, but must be applied to each independently, and
5. That portion of buffers in excess of one hundred fifty (150) feet will not be credited toward the buffer averaging formula within the boundaries of the property to be developed. The total width of the buffer shall not be less than seventy-five (75) feet, or the width of the floodway at any location, except at approved crossings.

Option B

A 30% stormwater utility fee discount is provided for the impervious portion of a property located within a delineated drainage area that drains to an approved buffer with a width of at least one hundred (100) feet, meeting the requirements described below. **This buffer may not be averaged.**

Option C

A 45% stormwater utility fee discount is provided for the impervious portion of a property located within a delineated drainage area that drains to an approved buffer with a width of at least one hundred fifty (150) feet, meeting the requirements described below. **This buffer may not be averaged.**

Requirements

In areas where a floodway profile has been computed (AE Zone) as part of an approved flood study, the buffer area should be the maximum width listed above or the width of the floodway, whichever is greater. If the width of the floodway is greater than the expanded buffer width from the top of the bank, the distance to bring the buffer to at least the floodway shall be added. In areas where a floodway study has not been computed (A Zones), the developer shall perform a flood study, determine the floodway and follow the buffer requirements outlined above. As an alternative to preparing the flood study, the buffer limits shall extend to the greater of either the delineated flood plain limits or the expanded buffer widths.

Buffers are most effective when stormwater runoff is flowing into and through the buffer zone as shallow sheet flow, rather than concentrated flow such as channels, gullies, or wet weather conveyances. Therefore, it is critical that the design of all development include management practices, to the maximum extent practical, that will result in stormwater runoff flowing into the buffer zone as shallow sheet flow.

In order for a property to receive the stream/wetland expanded buffer stormwater utility fee credit, it must meet the Buffer Management and Maintenance requirements and Design Requirements specified in the Stream Buffer Addendum of the Stormwater BMP Manual (<https://columbiascwater.net/all->

[forms-documents/](#)). Buffer reestablishment for an expanded buffer utility fee credit must be conducted in accordance with the Buffer Planting/Replanting section of the Stream Buffer Addendum.

Signage stating the area is a buffer and prohibiting mowing, cutting, and spraying within the buffer are required. The stream buffer and signage must be maintained in accordance with the signed stormwater utility fee stream buffer maintenance agreement. A report describing the status and condition of the preserved buffer(s), including photos, will be submitted annually to provide assurance that the buffer is maintained in accordance with the utility fee credit agreement. If, at any point, the City of Columbia determines that the stream buffer has not been properly maintained per the approved maintenance agreement, it reserves the right to revoke a previously approved utility fee credit.

Water **Quality**, Outreach and Education, or Water **Quantity** utility fee credits may be combined with the Expanded Stream and Wetland Buffer fee credit for a maximum of 60% fee credit. If a project is done as a retrofit for the sole purpose of restoring an expanded stream or wetland buffer per the Expanded Stream and Wetland Buffer fee credit requirements, the eligible developed portion of the property may receive double the credit for their buffer up to a maximum 60% fee credit.