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Derek, who is a member of the Farmington Hills Beautification Committee, said a retention basin near his house that feeds the tributary of the Rouge River that flows through his back yard is periodically treated to make it look blue, "for aesthetic reasons."

He's explained to subdivision associations and others that if they won't treat their lawns, algae plumes won't form and their backyard creeks will stay clear.

"Most people don't understand the middle ground," he said.

No ordinary Joe
Derek says he could think of a lot of other things to do with his time than talk about the environment. Once you see the mounted head of a caribou he hunted in northern Quebec, the fish in his aquarium that are native to endangered rain-forests, his German wirehair pointer named Brandy and a house full of arts and crafts that reflect his love of the outdoors, it's apparent this is no ordinary Joe.

His wife Judy, whom he met at work in 1981 and married four years later, found their courtship... well, unusual.

"He asked me if I wanted to go fishing," she said. "I said, 'Sure.' And I loved it."

The Dereks' two-acre property is a haven for wildflowers like butterfly bush, purple cone flowers, May apple and skunk cabbage, a morel mushroom patch and a barn from an era when the property was used as a pig farm.

It was a dream come true.
"We asked our Realtor to see if she could find a piece of property with a barn, a creek, rocks and a couple of acres, then call us," Derek said. "She called the next day and said, 'You aren't going to believe this.'"

That rare combination brought the Dereks to the Hills in 1989 and brought Joe Derek into conflict with some who saw recreation as strictly sporting activities.

Derek says he isn't against organized sports. He not only played them, but he has supported the recreational millage that partially went to buy the sod farm property that will be used for baseball, soccer and other sports.

"That's probably a reasonable use for that land, although I don't know what will happen to those meadow birds," he said.

Derek has often been asked why he doesn't leave the toads, downy woodpeckers and hawks of Farmington Hills and live somewhere else where he won't have to battle developers. But Derek said he likes the environment he lives in.

And besides, sooner or later, he would have the same battle.

"This is part of the city in the country," he says. "I think we need to push the environment."

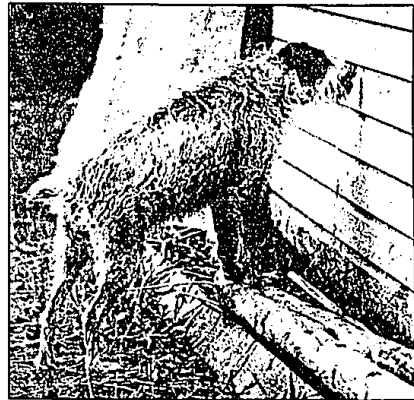
Derek says he doesn't want to howl every time a tree is cut down or a bird's nest is destroyed, but he's willing to accept the role as mother nature's advocate. And it's not likely a new development in Farmington Hills will be built without some consideration for what it will cost the environment.

"They know I'll yell," he said.



Chow time: Joe and Judy Derek feed the fish in a stream on their property in Farmington Hills.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIEUX



Listen hard: Brandy (left), the family dog, listens to a family of raccoons which has made a home in the wall of Derek's barn. Above: The Dereks looking down into a creek they are trying to keep free of lawn chemicals.

Coyote from page 1A

she's certain it's a coyote.
"I felt kind of silly calling the police," said the woman who asked that her name not be used. "I apologized for that but they said they received several calls on the matter."

Reports of coyotes pushing south have surfaced, according to Farmington area naturalist Joe Derek. He's skeptical, though.

Coyotes, which are distinguished by their patchy gray color and bushy tails, live in remote areas. It's highly unlikely one would be found in a residential area.

But Derek added: "In nature you never say never."

Derek speculates the animal may be a fox, possibly having a den near the M-102 freeway. Or, he adds, it could be a cross-bred dog.

Coyotes pose little danger to people unless cornered, he said.

"Basically, they're not going to attack people," Derek said.

79 Wixom pupils to move in fall

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The Walled Lake Board of Education Thursday night told residents living in the Wixom Elementary School attendance area to bite the redistricting bullet until new schools can be built.

But it could still turn into a powder keg before it's all over.
"Say no to the bond (issue) in the fall," said one angry resident as he left the Walled Lake Middle School cafeteria after midnight Friday.

He was referring to an anticipated bond issue for construction of new classroom facilities in time for the 1995-96 school year, which would hopefully reduce the need for future redistricting. The school board probably will be presented with a bond issue recommendation at one of its June meetings, said Superintendent James Geisler.

Meanwhile, according to Wixom Elementary parents, Thursday's 6-0 board decision to move 79 students to underpopulated Walled Lake Elementary School was made months ago — rendering moot, they claim, recent citizen input concerning alternative suggestions.
Most of the soon-to-be dis-

placed students reside in the adjacent Indian Wells and Indian Springs subdivisions, located on the northwest corner of Pontiac Trail-Beck Road. A third school included in several of the seven options reviewed Thursday night, Loon Lake Elementary, was not affected in the final recommendation.

With the OK'd recommendation, one section of the Wixom area simply will be shifted to the Walled Lake area. The plan doesn't account for future growth at Wixom and costs that school its classroom space for art and music, although both subjects probably will be taught in "on cart" fashion.
"It doesn't address the year after next," said assistant superintendent of elementary instruction Hugh Davies, who led the redistricting effort and took the brunt of the public's criticism. "But it gives the northern Wixom zones a chance to solidify."

Claims of politics
Other criticisms from parents included that the district wanted to take the "easiest route, not the best route." Thursday's decision was a Band-Aid approach to the

long-term growth issue; input from parents wasn't sought early enough.

"This was all politics in here tonight," said Kevin Hinkley, president of Indian Wells homeowners' association, following the long, emotional meeting. "Their decision was made before they came here tonight."

"A decision was sent to all homeowners that this was going to be done" prior to March-April citizen/redistricting committee meetings, Hinkley said.

Agreeing was another parent from the affected area, David Giordano, who said he was "appalled" at handling of the redistricting effort.

Giordano said Wixom parents who later got involved to try and help come up with a workable solution "didn't stand a chance against a committee that clearly made up its mind."

Wixom Elementary parent Tammy Kirby criticized the "process," mainly how the district didn't seek input from residents as soon as last fall, when it was learned the school would be at least 65 pupils over capacity (according to Fourth Friday pupil counts) for 1993-94.

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"There's almost an immediate benefit to the good things you do there," Fobbs said. "Also, you're able to invest in our future, which is our children."

Fobbs and his wife, Giselle, have six children, five of them in the Farmington Schools.

Violence prompted Fobbs involvement in schools. He's a member of Citizens Against Violence in the Schools, which formed this year.

He said his daughter was the victim of an assault by two males while a student at North Farmington High. The matter was resolved, Fobbs said.

He cites the cooperation between the school's principal, Deborah Clarke, police and social workers in the matter.

It's an example of bringing everyone to the table, a tactic he believes can tackle school finance, cultural diversity, transportation, building and safety issues.

On finance, Fobbs suggests trimming waste.

"One of the most important things is you have to take a look at how you're operating," he said. "Any large organization has some element of inefficiency."

Fobbs has visited schools in the district. He advocates making buildings more energy efficient. Overcrowding, though, has boiled over into other problems. Issues such as the Wooddale

parking lot and Beechview overcrowding divide people. Fobbs said he understands not everyone is satisfied.

"But what you also have to do is bring people into the decision making process rather than hitting them with the decision. Those are the things that cause problems."

Teamwork is also necessary in welcoming an increasingly diverse population of students, he said.

"Not in the essence of what we have in Detroit where people take multi-culturalism to an extreme," Fobbs added, "where people forget we're part of one great nation and that we have a lot to contribute."

"At the same time, people need to see the differences in cultures... and use it as a strength."

Life experiences indicate that. He's a 1971 graduate of Detroit Case Tech, attended Eastern Michigan University before transferring to Brigham Young University. He has a bachelor's degree in Zoology and a master's from the University of Puget Sound.

Outside activities include being a scoutmaster, a Sunday school teacher for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and is a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity.

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