The “Don’t Chuck Your Shucks” (DCYS) shell recycling program collects shells from local restaurants to use in projects that directly benefit the Inland Bays.

**Project Summary**

**Background**
Natural oyster shell is the best material for settlement and growth of young oysters. Given the shortage of shells for use in restoring the Inland Bays’ oyster population, the Center has formed partnerships with local businesses to divert oyster shells from landfills for use in shellfish enhancement projects.

**Project Description**
When you visit a participating restaurant and enjoy an oyster meal, the spent shells (shucks) from your plate will be separated from the waste stream and put into special bins. A Center employee picks up shells from the restaurants and transports them to a facility located near the Fresh Pond Tract of Delaware Seashore State Park. They are cured in the sun for six months to remove soft tissue and bacteria. The recycled shells are then used in local habitat restoration projects such as living shorelines, oyster reefs, and oyster gardening.

**Objective**
The DCYS Program teaches restaurant staff and patrons about the benefits of healthy oyster populations, as well as the Center’s mission to improve the Bays. Restaurant staff have opportunities to volunteer in “bagging” events and preparing shells for use in restoration projects.

**Project Timeline**
The shells are collected year-round, more often during the warmer months of the year when visitors frequent our local participating restaurants. The Center hosts “bagging” events throughout the year as the material is needed to complete restoration projects. It’s a great team-building event for organizations.
The Delaware Center for the Inland Bays is a non-profit organization established in 1994 to promote the wise use and enhancement of the Inland Bays and its watershed. With its many partners, the Center conducts public outreach and education, develops and implements restoration projects, encourages scientific inquiry and sponsors research. To learn how you can get on board with the bays go to inlandbays.org.

Outcomes/ Conclusions
As of 2022, more than 30,500 bushels of oyster shells have been collected by the DCYS program. That’s over 900 tons of oyster shells diverted from landfills. These shells have supported the first three oyster reefs completed by the Center and living shorelines completed with a diversity of partners.

Project Highlights
In 2022, 6,105 bushels of shells were collected from participating DCYS restaurants. The Center hopes to collect at least 6,000 bushels of shells in 2023.

Funding Partners
The program is funded by a combination of private donations and grants from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. All fundraising activities are supported by private funds.

CCMP Focus Area
This project fulfills objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) for the Delaware Inland Bays:

- Focus Area: Healthy Bay Ecosystems: Protect and restore thriving habitats for abundant fish and wildlife
- Objective: Enhance populations of eastern oysters and other shellfish species.

What you can do
- Enjoy oysters in our local participating restaurants.
- Volunteer to help the Center bag shells, build reefs, or join our outreach programs.
- For more information and to find restaurants visit, inlandbays.org/dont-chuck-your-shucks.