# Statement on Decolonizing Description in *<Sitka member library>* catalogue

Library users and staff may encounter harmful or problematic terminology in their library’s catalogue. Libraries have been complicit in perpetuating a knowledge organization system reflective of a colonial worldview and maintaining colonial approaches to descriptive practice. Libraries using Sitka Evergreen’s Integrated Library System have been using controlled, standardized vocabulary derived from Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) to describe and provide subject-based catalogue access to library collections. LCSH terminology used to describe library materials on topics of Indigenous Peoples and cultures have long been recognized as biased, outdated, offensive, and in need of updating to align more closely with preferred terminology, language in use, and providing improved subject-based access to library materials on these topics.

A shift from reliance upon LCSH for describing library materials on Indigenous topics offers libraries an opportunity to challenge and decenter the cognitive imperialism inherent in LCSH and standardized descriptive practices in order to provide respectful and equitable access to collections.

As a library member of a consortium, we are committed to:

* Ongoing learning with humility from professional resources and projects to inform approaches and to improve descriptive practices
* Centring care and awareness for library user communities in the ways we approach descriptive practices
* Welcoming diverse perspectives by engaging and consulting library user communities
* Perceiving the catalogue as a “living” resource to be maintained and updated with evolving changes to subject-based terminology and descriptive practices
* Removing inaccurate, outdated, biased, and offensive subject-based terminology to be replaced with updated subject-based terminology that aims to accurately describe library materials and provide subject-based access with consideration to equitable and inclusive access and retrieval of library materials on Indigenous topics
* Engaging with professional development opportunities and resources to inform approaches and to continually improve descriptive practices
* Acknowledging the intersectionality of this work, and the harmful effects of LCSH terminology upon diverse groups of library user communities. Future phases of this work will consider and update subject-based terminology for describing materials on topics such as, IBPOC, women, 2SLGBTQ+, neurodiverse people, and people with disabilities.

For more information on Sitka’s Consortial Evergreen Integrated Library System and the Catalogue Working Group, or to find contextual resources on decolonizing descriptive practice, visit: [Link to BCLC Sitka Support webpage on Decolonizing Description](https://bc.libraries.coop/support/sitka/decolonizing-description/)

## Our Commitment to Decolonizing Descriptive Practice in Sitka's Evergreen: Background

The [community of libraries using Sitka’s Evergreen Integrated Library System](https://bc.libraries.coop/services/sitka/current-sitka-libraries/), and Sitka’s hosting organization, the [BC Libraries Cooperative](https://bc.libraries.coop/), are committed to advancing meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples by removing terminology in the shared catalogue descriptive metadata that is racist, harmful, outdated and culturally biased and replacing it with respectful language.

In Spring of 2019, members of the Sitka Business Function Group (SBFG) began discussions to explore decolonizing descriptive practice in Sitka’s shared database in response to recommendations of the [CFLA-FCAB Truth and Reconciliation Report](https://cfla-fcab.ca/en/indigenous/trc_report/).

A Cataloguing Working Group (CWG) formed in early 2020 and Terms of Reference were developed to scope the group’s goals. Initial work of the CWG included identifying and engaging with key resources to inform and support the work of the committee and to increase awareness of this initiative in the wider Sitka community.

Since early 2022, a subset of the CWG has been investigating approaches and principles to advance this work.

# Scope of Sitka Consortium

Sitka’s Consortial Evergreen Integrated Library System is used by over 100 multitype libraries at about 210 locations, serving nearly 900,000 registered users primarily in British Columbia and Manitoba. Over 70% of public libraries in BC and over 50% of public libraries in Manitoba participate in Sitka’s Evergreen, as well as 14 public or private post-secondary libraries, six childcare resource/literacy centres, and several government, school, museum and specialized libraries. The geographic area represented by Sitka’s membership is inhabited by over 250 First Nations and nearly 400,000 Indigenous Peoples. Given the scale, diversity and complexity of Sitka’s membership and service area, the CWG is collaboratively and carefully approaching this work.

# Approach

The CWG is continuing to review approaches to advance the work of decolonizing and indigenizing description in Sitka’s shared catalogue. In addition to traditional library controlled vocabularies such as Library of Congress Subject Headings and Canadian Subject Headings, the CWG is also closely monitoring initiatives such as [NIKLA](https://www.nikla-ancla.com/)’s platform for Respectful Terminology, an Indigenous-led ‘’open and online platform that will enable a dynamic, multilingual set of terminologies applied to Indigenous Peoples, places, heritage, tradition, knowledge and culture... [which] would replace outdated and inappropriate terminologies used currently in cultural memory sectors such as museums, libraries, archives centers and galleries.’’

# Updates

The CWG will bring recommendations back to the wider Sitka Business Function Group for consideration. Further details, updates on our progress, and changes to terminology will be shared here: [*Link to BCLC Sitka Support page on Decolonizing Description*](https://bc.libraries.coop/support/sitka/decolonizing-description/)

*February 1, 2023*